

Lesson Title: The Great Ming Naval Expeditions vs. the Western Explorations in the Age of Discovery

Class: World history, world geography
Grade level(s): High School

Goals and Objectives:

The student will:

- Increase their knowledge and understanding of the history of China through the study of the Great Ming Naval Expeditions and the abrupt end to the voyages and subsequent isolationism of China. (NOTE: An excellent precursor to this lesson and one that will help students better understand China's isolationism would be to study the Chinese voyages and trade missions of the 1400's.)
- Demonstrate an understanding of historical events and significant people of the Ming Dynasty.
- Compare and contrast the voyages of exploration and trade of China and that of European nations during the 1400's.
- Discuss the evidence and theories that China, during the Great Ming Naval expeditions, may have traveled beyond the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

Time required/class periods needed: 3-4 50-minute class periods plus one day for presentations

Primary source bibliography:

<http://www.dragonvoyage.com/history/poem.shtml>

Translation of a poem written by Ma Huan in 1416 recounting the observations he made during the voyage of 1413-1415.

http://www.fas.nus.edu.sg/hist/eia/documents_archive/changle.php Much of the information about the voyages was destroyed along with the ships. This is a translation of the inscription of on the Changle stele which was written by Zheng He in 1431. You will have to scroll down to find it.

http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/shepherd/explorer_map_shepherd.jpg

Map of the world during the Age of Discovery 1340-1600. Zoom in to various parts of the map as you show the route of the Chinese voyages to the students.

Other resources:

High school students and history teacher love a good history mystery. This can be explored at:
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/sultan/explorers.html>

This site is a companion site to the 2001 PBS video, "The Sultan's Last Treasure". This particular part of the website explains the voyages of the Ming Naval expeditions and speculates on a theory that Chinese vessels may have traveled much further than the Indian and Pacific oceans.

<http://asiasociety.org/countries-history/trade-exchange/chinese-trade-indian-ocean>

This website provides background information on the Ming Dynasty. It provides information on the trade networks established by Chinese ships and through diplomatic missions. The reading mentions that the expeditions were stopped in 1424, but does not address the destruction of the Chinese fleet BY the Chinese or discuss the reasons for the destruction.

http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Ming_Dynasty

An excellent website for background on the Ming Dynasty.

<http://www.britannica.com/topic/European-exploration>

About European exploration in the 15th century.

http://mrfarshtey.net/classes/Expansion-China_Europe.ppt

A PowerPoint comparing the motives behind the Chinese exploration with those behind the European exploration. If you have trouble getting this file to open, google "Chinese exploration vs. European exploration" and it should be the first hit on the webpage that takes you to.

Required materials/supplies:

Internet access, World History textbook (optional), videos, projector, printed readings, PowerPoint (available on the CEAS Lesson Plan website as The Great Ming Naval Expeditions PPT), and maps,

Vocabulary and Key concepts / individuals:

Dynasty, Ming dynasty, eunuch, junk, treasure ship, Zheng He, isolationism, mariners, astrolabe, sextant, caravel

Procedure:

(Session One)

Print out the text from http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/special/china_1000ce_mingvoyages.htm.

Ask students to read the text in class (or as homework). Have students get into “Jigsaw” groups – numbered 1-6. Have all of the students in Group One agree on the most important item to remember from the Introduction part of this website. Group 2 will be asked to present the main idea and most important piece of the section titled “The Emperor and his Ambition” and so on through the six sections. Students will migrate to form new groups made up of a member from each jigsaw group to discuss 1 through 6.

Homework: Have students read article about European exploration in the 15th century

<http://www.britannica.com/topic/European-exploration>

(Session Two)

Bell Ringer: Write three important points learned from the Britannica article. Share with class.

Show students the map from the Age of Discovery. Using a printed map of the current world, trace the voyages of Zheng He in one color and then use another color to draw the exploration routes of western explorers prior to 1492.

Class discussion: Compare and contrast these different voyages.

Show comparison PowerPoint.

Show YouTube video comparing the size of the Chinese ships to the size of Columbus’s largest ship:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FI1AmTa-bV0&feature=related&safety_mode=true&persist_safety_mode=1.

This article can be used too: http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/sultan/media/expl_01q.html (0:03:27)

Show short video from NOVA online that provides additional information about the size of the Chinese ships.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/sultan/archeology.html> and

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/sultan/> (0:00:59)

Discussion question: *What differences do you notice about these two ships?*

If there is time, show comparison PowerPoint http://mrfarshtey.net/classes/Expansion-China_Europe.ppt

(Session Three)

Discussion starter: Why do you think the Chinese halted their explorations?

Use Part 2 of the attached PPT presentation. (Part 1 deals with the Tokugawa Shogunate. Use Part 2 of this PowerPoint for the information on Admiral Zheng He and the Naval Expeditions.)

Place students in study teams of four to focus on one topic that pertains to the objectives of the lessons. Have students create their own PPT presentation or other type of presentation.

- Who was Zheng He? Why was he chosen over someone else such as a Confucian official?
- Who were the significant individuals and what were the significant events in the Ming Dynasty?
- What did the Great Ming Naval Expeditions accomplish?
- What types of trade goods would have been on these treasure ships?
- What was the significance of these Chinese ships and what was their diplomatic mission?
- What caused China to stop sailing the treasure ships and close itself to the outside world?
- Compare and contrast the Chinese voyages to the European voyages of exploration during the same time period.
- Create an argument in favor of the speculation that China MAY have reached the Americas BEFORE Columbus. Be sure to include information on where the Chinese traveled, traded and explored in your argument.
- Create an argument against the speculation the China MAY have reached the Americas BEFORE Columbus. Be sure to include information on where the Chinese traveled, traded and explored.

Assessment/evaluation:

Students will be assessed on their contribution to class discussion and their presentations.