

**Editor's Note:** Please see “China, Global History, and the Sea: Pedagogical Perspectives and Applications” from our Fall 2020 issue (Vol. 25, No. 2) on pages 18–25. This supplement contains visual sidebars and recommended resources related to the article and the accompanying case study and guide, “Mongol Invasions of Northeast Asia: Korea and Japan.” The case study and guide may be accessed separately in our online supplements at <https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/ea/online-supplemental-materials/>

*China, Global History, and the Sea: Pedagogical Perspectives and Applications*  
*Visual Sidebars and Recommended Maritime Resources*  
 By Grant Rhode



The Defeat of the Mongol Invasion Fleet, wood block print by Utagawa Yoshitora, active from about 1850 to 1880. Source: Print from collection of Grant Rhode, photo courtesy of Fuji Arts.

**The Defeat of the Mongol Invasion Fleet**  
***Kamikaze, the “Divine Wind”***

At the end of the second Mongol invasion of Japan in 1281, a great typhoon struck the Mongol fleet south of the island of Takashima in Kyushu, resulting in devastation of the fleet, forcing the return of fleet remnants to Korea. Religious orders in Japan took credit for the Mongol defeat, saying that their prayers to the *kami*, Shintō gods, had been answered when the great wind, *kaze*, was sent by the *kami* to sink the Mongol fleet. Thus, the *kamikaze* “divine wind” saved Japan from the Mongols. Japanese samurai had organized a gritty defense against the Mongols during both the first and second invasion attempts, but the credit and consequent rewards following the conflict went more to religious orders than to samurai soldiers.

Thus, the *kamikaze* lodged for centuries in the Japanese imagination as the primary cause of the Mongol defeat. As the tide of war turned against the Japanese in the Pacific during World War II and the American forces under Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz pushed closer toward the Japanese home islands, the Japanese remembered how the divine wind had saved Japan from invasion during the thirteenth century. Between two and three thousand Japanese pilots volunteered to become the new “divine wind” to save Japan from invasion. Their *kamikaze* suicide missions sank or damaged 350 American ships, but this time, the *kamikaze* results were not enough to save Japan from occupation by outside forces. After the war, Admiral Nimitz said that pre-war war-gaming had prepared him for every Japanese move in the Pacific, including the complex island-hopping campaigns, with one exception. He had not anticipated the *kamikaze* suicide missions, even as the Mongols had been unprepared for the *kamikaze* typhoon.<sup>1</sup>



Replica ship at the Nanjing shipyard drydocks where Zheng He's treasure ships were built during the fifteenth century. Source: Photo courtesy of Grant Rhode, 2013.

### **Zheng He Replica Treasure Ship in Nanjing**

#### ***Zheng He ship size controversy: Were the treasure ships 200 feet or 400 feet long?***

Many consider Zheng He to have sailed the largest wooden ships ever built, noting them to be over 400 feet long.<sup>2</sup> The standard Ming history, the *Ming Shi*, describes the ships as forty-four *zhang* long by eighteen *zhang* wide. Since a *zhang* is about ten feet long, Zheng He's largest ships would have been over 400 feet long if these historical descriptions are correct. Keep in mind that modern aircraft carriers are only about twice as long as this. No nautical archaeological evidence exists to verify the size of Zheng He's ships, except for a rudder post excavated in 1962 at the Longjiang shipyard in Nanjing. A ship of 400 plus feet has been extrapolated from the size of the thirty-six-foot rudder post by making assumptions based on extant Chinese wooden ships.<sup>3</sup> Aside from this one piece of available archaeological evidence, literary sources such as the *Ming Shi* and other early accounts are the basis for the 400-foot estimate.

Others argue that Zheng He's ships were in the 200-foot long range, similar to Lord Nelson's flagship *Victory* preserved in Portsmouth harbor, UK.<sup>4</sup> The Zheng He replica treasure ship in the shipyard drydock in Nanjing is just over 200 feet long.<sup>5</sup> Arguments for the shorter ship length include displacement and crew size calculations, alternate assumptions about the rudder post, and mostly significantly, engineering arguments that European ships were limited to about 200 feet because of longitudinal strength issues. These issues would have confronted Chinese ships as well. However, it is possible that the longitudinal strength issues might have been solved through the use of structural bracing. Unless conclusive archaeological evidence of a hull or bracing is found, the debate is likely to continue about the length of Zheng He's ships.





HMS Cornwallis model at Jinghai Temple in Nanjing. Source: Photo courtesy of Grant Rhode, 2013

### **Treaty of Nanjing signed aboard the *HMS Cornwallis***

#### ***The end of the Canton system, the beginning of the “Century of Humiliation”***

At the end of the First Opium War begun in Guangzhou (Canton) in 1839, the power of British naval guns forced Chinese Representatives to negotiate a humiliating treaty at Jinghai Temple beneath Lion Hill in Nanjing.<sup>6</sup> In August, 1842, the Treaty of Nanjing was signed by Sir Henry Pottinger aboard the *HMS Cornwallis*, which swung at anchor in the Yangzi River on the shore near the Jinghai temple.<sup>7</sup> The terms of the treaty gave Britain free trading rights at five treaty ports along the China coast, thereby modifying the Canton trading system that had previously existed. The ports were spaced evenly along the China coast at Canton, Xiamen, Fuzhou, Ningbo, and Shanghai. Provisions were granted for fixed tariffs, extraterritoriality, and most favored nation status. In addition, China ceded the island of Hong Kong to the British.

As the first of the “unequal treaties” that China was to sign, the Treaty of Nanjing marked the beginning of China’s “Century of Humiliation,” which continued until Chairman Mao announced that China had “stood up” with the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. In fact, residual negative feelings about this century of subjugation and disorder still color Chinese foreign policy, so that China is unwilling to subject itself to what it perceives to be foreign pressure as it had in Nanjing in 1842. Reflecting on its subjugation by sea during the nineteenth century, today’s Chinese leadership is developing a powerful navy. On the twenty-first century global stage, China feels that naval power is essential to avoid another period of humiliation.

### **Selected Reading Recommendations**

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### NOTES

1. Admiral Nimitz's comment is documented in the US Naval War College Museum. It is drawn from his 4,000-page operational diary of World War II in the Pacific covering the period December 7, 1941 through August 31, 1945. Referred to as *The Nimitz Graybook*, this document was put online in 2014: <http://www.usnwc.edu/graybook>, after thirty years of remaining classified after the war.
2. Aside from Needham, works citing the large size of Zheng He's ships include Edward Dreyer, *Zheng He: China and the Oceans in the Early Ming Dynasty, 1405 – 1433*, New York: Pearson Longman, 2006, 112; Louise Levathes, *When China Ruled the seas: the Treasure Fleet at the Dragon Throne, 1405–1433*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, 80; Yang Wei, “Admiral Zheng He's Voyages to the ‘West Ocean,’” *Education About Asia* 19, no. 2 (2014): 27.
3. See rudder discussion in Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, Vol. 4: Physics and Physical Technology, Part III: Civil Engineering and Nautics, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971, 481.
4. Detailed arguments with counterarguments and citations for the shorter length are put forward by Sally Church, “Zheng He: An Investigation into the Plausibility of 450-ft Treasure Ships,” *Monumenta Serica*, 53 (2005): 1-43.
5. The replica treasure ship in the Nanjing boatyards is just over 200 feet long as calculated by seventy-two paces of the author's stride during a visit to the Nanjing docks and replica ship in November, 2013. In building the replica, Chinese authorities appear to have accepted the shorter ship argument, perhaps siding with the engineering opinion of Xin Yuan'ou, Professor of Shipbuilding and Engineering at Shanghai Jiaotong University and cited by Church.
6. Jinghai Temple was built in 1407 by Ming Emperor Yongle to celebrate the return of Zheng He from his first successful voyage to the Western Ocean. At the temple near the Longjiang shipyard where his treasure ships had been built, Zheng He

prayed to Tian Fei, sometimes called Mazu, Chinese goddess of the sea, and thanked her for safe return from his first expedition to the Indian Ocean. Zheng He was a Muslim, practiced Buddhism, and worshipped Tian Fei, all representing important parts of his character.

7. *HMS Cornwallis* was built of teak in the large British Bombay Dockyard. The ship was named for Lord Charles Cornwallis who lost the Battle of Yorktown in Virginia in 1781, leading to Britain's loss of the American colonies. Cornwallis' career survived the Yorktown defeat and he later became Governor General of India. It is ironic that, being known for having lost the American colonies, Cornwallis is also associated with the semi-colonization of China through the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing aboard a ship named for him.

### “Mongol Invasions of Northeast Asia: Korea and Japan”

**Case Study:** <https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/ea/online-supplemental-materials/>

**Guide:** <https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/ea/online-supplemental-materials/>

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