

Fleet Admiral Cheng Ho's Attraction towards Sri Lanka: An Act of Diplomacy or Obsession? An Analytical Study based on his Expeditions to Sri Lanka

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Under the patronage of Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 A. D.) China became a unified strong multinational feudal supremacy. The third ruler of the Ming Dynasty known as Yung Lo, ascended to the throne in 1403 A. D. having destroyed the Mongol tribe's domination of nearly nine decades. In 1409 A. D. Yung Lo strode south to Nanjing and abducted the Dragon throne. He pronounced himself the emperor and chose the dynastic title of Yung Lo. From the 9th century onwards China had developed its own armada but Yung Lo had a very ambitious scheme of increasing the Chinese fleet to implausible dimensions and building an empire dominating the oceans. He authorized 1681 new ships. Thousands of people were appointed to work in the shipyards. The emperor's ships would sail round the oceans of the world bringing the entire globe within China's reach. Sino-Lanka relations in the 15th century have to be viewed against the backdrop of these impressive projects of the Ming dynasty. The visits of the Grand Eunuch Cheng too were not accidental but purposeful and an essential feature of the Ming Dynasty's foreign policy. The objective of this study is to examine the Fleet Admiral Cheng Ho's six visits to Sri Lanka in historical and epigraphical sources. The data extracted through these sources is analysed to reveal the obsession of Cheng Ho's attraction towards Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Ming dynasty, Yung lo, Cheng Ho, six voyages,
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