China Trade in the Ming Dynasty

Trade and Travel during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644)

Under Yonglo, who began his rule in 1403, seven major sea voyages were launched. These voyages, led by Zheng He, had two purposes. One goal was to explore new regions. The other was to impress foreign regions with China’s power so that they would pay tribute. Zheng He set sail with between 40 and 300 huge ships in each expedition. During each voyage, he distributed gifts of silver and silk to show Chinese superiority.

1. Identify the two purposes of Zheng He's voyages in the name of China?
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2. Fill in the chart with the key facts of the voyages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of the expeditions</th>
<th>What they gave away/Purpose</th>
<th>Results</th>
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As a result of Zheng He’s voyages, trade increased and China’s reputation grew. Several countries did send tribute. Nevertheless, scholar-officials complained that the voyages wasted valuable resources and China withdrew into isolation.

To enforce the isolation policy, only the government was allowed to trade with foreigners. Still, demand for Chinese goods increased. Unofficially, Chinese merchants smuggled cargoes of silk, porcelain, and other valuable goods to European buyers. Industries, including silk making and ceramics, grew rapidly. Despite increased manufacturing activity, China remained a mainly agricultural country. The government continued to favor farming. Confucian beliefs looked down upon commerce.

3. Why did the scholar-officials complain about the voyages?
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4. What does it mean when China withdrew into isolation? How did the government enforce it?
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5. How did the merchants bypass the rules of isolation?
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6. What conflict emerged in the Chinese economy? Which viewpoint did the government favor?
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7. **Critical Thinking:** China withdrew from the world economy after years of trade with the West. In what way was this decision beneficial or harmful to the Chinese people and economy?
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