



LESSON 1



Asian Emperors and Traders

Read Aloud

"Let the dark water dragons go down into the sea and leave us free from calamity," prayed the Chinese sea captains. In the autumn of 1405, over 300 Chinese ships were made ready to sail to the east coast of India. The captains' prayer asked their gods to protect them from danger. They were worried about what lay ahead.*

THE BIG PICTURE

You have been reading about the peoples of the Western Hemisphere. Now you are going to read about the peoples of the Eastern Hemisphere. In the late 1400s, the peoples of the West met the peoples of the East. The lives of these peoples were changed forever. You will look at life in Asia at a time when Asian people first met people from Africa and Europe.

In the eastern part of Asia is the country of **China**. At about the same time that the Aztec and Inca were building their empires in the Western Hemisphere, the Chinese had enlarged their empire in the Eastern Hemisphere.

*Mariner's prayer from "When China Ruled the Seas" (1994), translated by Chu Hung-lam and James Geiss.

THE CHINESE EMPIRE

The people of China saw their land as the great empire. As you will see from the map on page 116, this huge land was protected by the Himalaya Mountains to the west, the Gobi Desert to the north, and the Pacific Ocean to the east. Despite these protections, invaders broke through. In the late 1200s, the Mongols from the north gained control of China.

The Chinese pushed the Mongols out in 1368. In 1402 the emperor of China, **Zhu Di** (ZHOO DEE), set out to rebuild the **Great Wall** to keep invaders out of China.

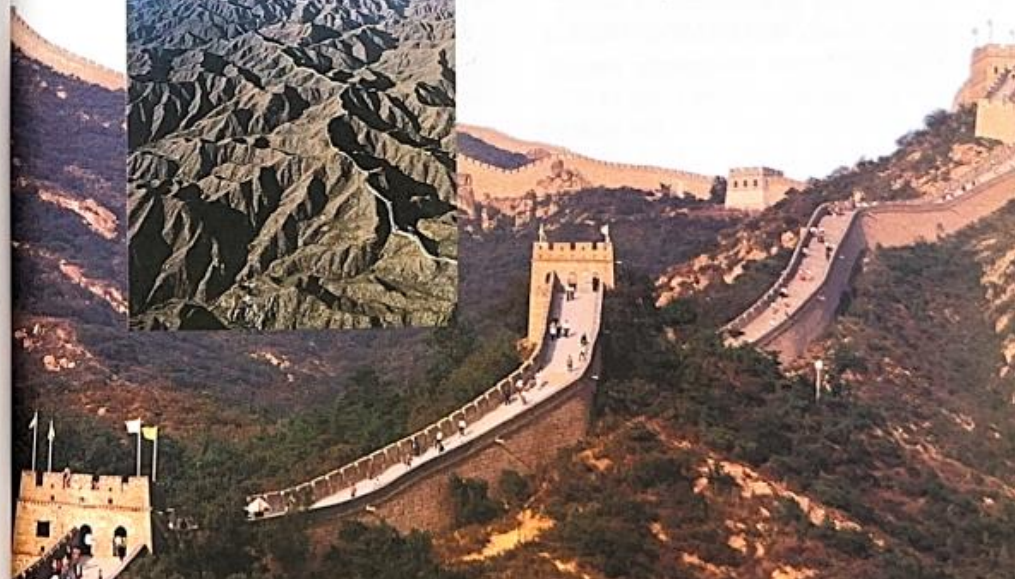


The Silk Road

Zhu Di also increased trade on the ancient **Silk Road**. The Silk Road was a network of overland trade routes from China to **Persia**. Today Persia is the country of Iran. During the late 1200s, people in Europe wanted so much Chinese silk that the route was known as the Silk Road. Find the Silk Road on the map on the next page.

Through a chain of Chinese, Indian, Arab, and Italian traders, the silk made its long journey over Asia's mountains and deserts to Europe. In exchange, oranges, gold, and horses were brought to China. However, few traders traveled the entire Silk Road. Most of them passed goods from one trading post to the next.

The Great Wall of China (below) is the longest human-made feature ever built. It is 4,600 miles long.



Focus Activity

READ TO LEARN

How did the Chinese increase trade in the East?

VOCABULARY

- magnetic compass

PEOPLE

- Zhu Di
- Zheng He

PLACES

- China
- Great Wall
- Silk Road
- Persia
- India

CHINA: EXPLORATION AND TRADE, 1400s

MAP WORK



The 1400s were a time of exploration and trade for the Chinese empire.

1. Name four different bodies of water that Zheng He sailed during his voyages.
2. In which part of China is the Great Wall located?
3. What landforms would make traveling along the Silk Road difficult?

ZHENG HE'S VOYAGES

In 1403 emperor Zhu Di ordered the building of thousands of sailing ships. **Zheng He** (ZHAHNG HUH), a Chinese Muslim sea captain, was put in command of the huge fleet. Muslims are followers of the religion of Islam. From 1405 to 1433, Zheng He made seven voyages. He explored **India**, southeast Asia, Arabia, and the coast of East Africa.

The Ships of Zheng He

Over 300 ships were part of Zheng He's fleet. To find directions at sea, the sailors used a **magnetic compass**. The Chinese invented the magnetic compass in about A.D. 100. Sailors used a compass that floated

in a container of water so that the needle was not upset by the ship's movement.

Perhaps Zheng He made these voyages to find new trading centers for China. Perhaps the emperor wanted to show others the power of the Chinese empire. China's days of exploration ended in 1525 when a new emperor had the empire's sailing ships destroyed. China's chances for becoming a sea power were over.

A Chinese Tale

Over many centuries, tales have been exchanged among different peoples in the Eastern Hemisphere. Zheng He's voyages helped to bring new tales to Asia.

The Chinese may have been the first to write down a tale about a young woman who lost her shoe. Following is an excerpt from the Chinese tale of Yeh-hsien (YE SHEN). How is her story like *Cinderella*?



MANY VOICES PRIMARY SOURCE

Excerpt from Yeh-hsien
translated by Arthur Waley,
in *The Chinese Cinderella Story*,
adapted by Judy Sierra, 1992.

The man who had picked up the gold shoe sold it in **T'o-han** (TOH HAHN), and it was brought to the king. He ordered all the women of the court to put it on, but it was too small even for the one among them that had the smallest foot. He then ordered all the women in his kingdom to try it on, but there was not one that it fitted. It was as light as **down**, and it made no noise even when **treading** on stone. His search finally took him to the place where Yeh-hsien lived with her stepmother, and the shoe fitted her perfectly.

T'o-han: an imaginary kingdom
down: fine, soft feathers
treading: walking

WHY IT MATTERS

China is more than 3,000 years old. Until the 1400s, China had done little trading with Europe. Then Zheng He began sailing to countries in the Eastern Hemisphere. This was before Europe had started exploring the Western Hemisphere. China stopped sailing to other lands when a new Chinese emperor sank all of China's ships.

✓ Reviewing Facts and Ideas

SUM IT UP

- In the 1400s, the Aztec and Inca empires were growing. China was building a powerful empire.
- Traders on the Silk Road carried silk and other goods from China to Europe. They brought oranges and horses back to China.
- From 1405 to 1433, Zheng He explored India, southeast Asia, Arabia, and the east coast of Africa.

THINK ABOUT IT

1. What natural features helped to protect China from invasions?
2. How was the Silk Road named?
3. **FOCUS** What did Zheng He do for the Chinese empire?
4. **THINKING SKILL** List the cause and effect connections between the Chinese invention of the magnetic compass and Zheng He's voyages.
5. **WRITE** Write about the kinds of shoes Cinderella might wear today.