

THE SECRET OF ZHENG HE'S VOYAGES TO THE WEST

鄭和下西洋的秘密

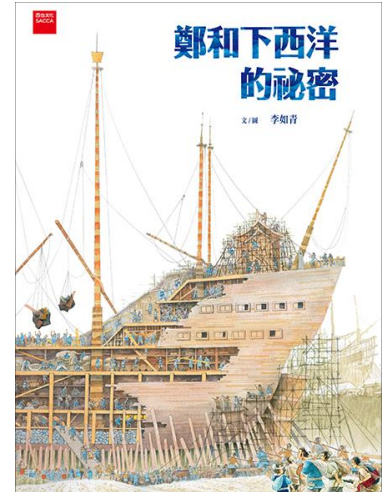
Over 600 years ago, in the Ming dynasty, Zheng He's fleet prepared to sail to the west. A young carpenter called Wu was excited to be part of this grand undertaking. He thought he'd just be hammering and chiselling, a tiny screw in the whole project, but thanks to a packet of seeds from his grandfather he came to play a much larger role.

Over 600 years ago, before Magellan and Columbus set sail, the Chinese admiral Zheng He led an enormous fleet of ships into the southern seas. A carpenter called Wu was excited to be part of the plans. Although his job was to help build the ships, he dreamed of climbing on board and going to sea. He worked hard every day, but still found time to follow his grandfather's instructions – to plant the seeds he had brought with him, and grow vegetables that tasted of home. Wu never expected that doing something as small as planting seeds would bring about great changes for the fleet!

For a grand undertaking, when everyone must do what they do best, and everyone has a specific role, a tiny idea can have a massive impact. After consulting old texts and visiting historical remains, Lee Ru-Qing has written the glorious history of Zheng He's voyage in a completely new way – from the perspective of a lowly carpenter. Instead of writing about the ambitions of emperors and dignitaries, he shows the wisdom of a young carpenter, and how the astonishing power of seeds made the dream of conquering the oceans come true.

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Born on Kinmen, Lee Ru-Qing came to the Taiwanese mainland to seek a better life. After art school, Lee worked in advertising for ten years until in 2007, he started writing children's picture books. His published works include *The Spearfish King*, *Because I Love You*, *Brave 12: The War Pigeons* and *The Last Bodyguard of Lion Fortress*.



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He has won many awards, including the Golden Tripod Award.



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Translated by Helen Wang

According to Ming dynasty records,
in the third year of the Yongle era (1405)
the Emperor prepared to send an envoy to the west...

p.2-3

The Yongle Emperor of the Ming dynasty was very ambitious.
He wanted to open up trade, engage with more countries,
and explore distant oceans...

To do so, he needed to find someone wise, learned and brave,
and above all, someone with integrity and ability, someone with vision.
But who could take on such a massive task?

p.4-5

Zheng He was the ideal person.
But taking on this commission was a headache for Zheng He –
What size of ships were needed to “go to the west”?
How many ships were needed to show the Emperor’s might?
How many brave men and how many cannons
Were needed to show the strength of the Great Ming dynasty?

p.6-7

How much silk and how much porcelain
Were needed to show the artistic accomplishments of our craftsmen?

p.8-9

How would the ships communicate with each other?
How would he manage so many people?
Would the people in distant, unfamiliar countries be friendly or hostile?
It would be such a long voyage.
How would he supply enough food and water?
How would he keep the crew healthy?

p.10-11

The best craftsmen in the land were called to the capital,
to build the fleet of ships Zheng He would take to the west.
Among them was Wu.

Wu was from a well-known family of shipbuilders.
He had built so many ships with his grandfather,
but he had never been to sea.
“Perhaps this time?” he hoped with all his heart.

p.10-11

“I heard the Treasure Ships are enormous! How big can they be?”
The ships were the talk of the town.

p.12-13

Wu walked past the metalworkers, sailmakers and ropeworkers,
There was banging here, clanging there, people shouting everywhere.
“Wow! This is the biggest ship I’ve ever seen.”

p.12-13

Wu came to where the grain ships were being built.
Even the grain ships were enormous!

p.14-15

Wu had to work very hard every day!
But he didn’t forget the packet of seeds that Yeye had given him,
or what Yeye had said: “Plant them in a bowl,
sprinkle them with water every day and they’ll soon sprout.

When you feel homesick, pick a few leaves and put them in your soup,
and then it’ll taste of home!”

p.16-17

The construction schedule was very tight,
but Wu looked forward to meal times
when he could eat fresh vegetables that tasted of home!
Gradually, the whole team of carpenters
came to love that taste too.

p.18-19

They followed Wu's example,
and planted their own favourite vegetables.
Hardworking Wu turned some scrap wood into shelves
so that everyone could grow their own plants.

p.20-21

One day, when they were all eating
a high-ranking official came to inspect their work.
He noticed the delicious smell in the air.
"What are you eating?" he asked.
Everyone pointed to the shelves full of plants.

When he saw the plant pots on the shelves bursting with life
the official couldn't believe his eyes! He was lost for words!
Everyone was scared! Was he going to punish them?

p.21-22

The next day, Wu was taken away.
When he learned that the official was Zheng He himself,
he was so scared that his legs turned to jelly.

But, Zheng He listened to Wu, and wasn't angry at all.
He praised the young carpenter, and rewarded him with gold.

p.23-24

After that, Wu had a new job.
He was in charge of looking after vegetables
for the whole fleet.

p.25-26

Time was running out, they had to work fast
They had to finish in time for the monsoon winds!

p.27-28

At last the Treasure Ships were ready!
Zheng He led the launch ceremony.
He burned incense and prayed for luck.
Then the Treasure Ships moved slowly,
the barriers were removed

and giant waves rose up.

p.29-30

The final preparations were made
For the long voyage ahead.
Cargo was loaded, cannons were fitted...
It was noisy and exciting!

Wu waved goodbye to the other craftsmen. He was going to sea!
He would be looking after all the fresh vegetables,
so that the whole crew could have the vitamins they needed
and a taste of home.

p.30-31

Then the monsoon winds arrived!

p.32-33

On a scale that the world had never seen before,
the longest chain of ships,
the most technically advanced fleet,
with the largest crew,
stopped at Fujian and Guangdong
to pick up Chinese silk, porcelain and other wonderful things
and then headed for the open sea!

p.34-35

With the wind in its sails... to the other side of the world!

p.36-37

In the European Age of Exploration, what the sailors feared most
was not the terrible sea-storms,
but scurvy, caused by a lack of Vitamin C.
Zheng He led seven voyages to the west.
On the first voyage alone
there were over 27,000 men,
and it was thanks to tiny seeds
that all of these men had fresh vegetables
that gave them enough Vitamin C
to resist disease.

p.40-41

Even a tiny little seed
has great potential.