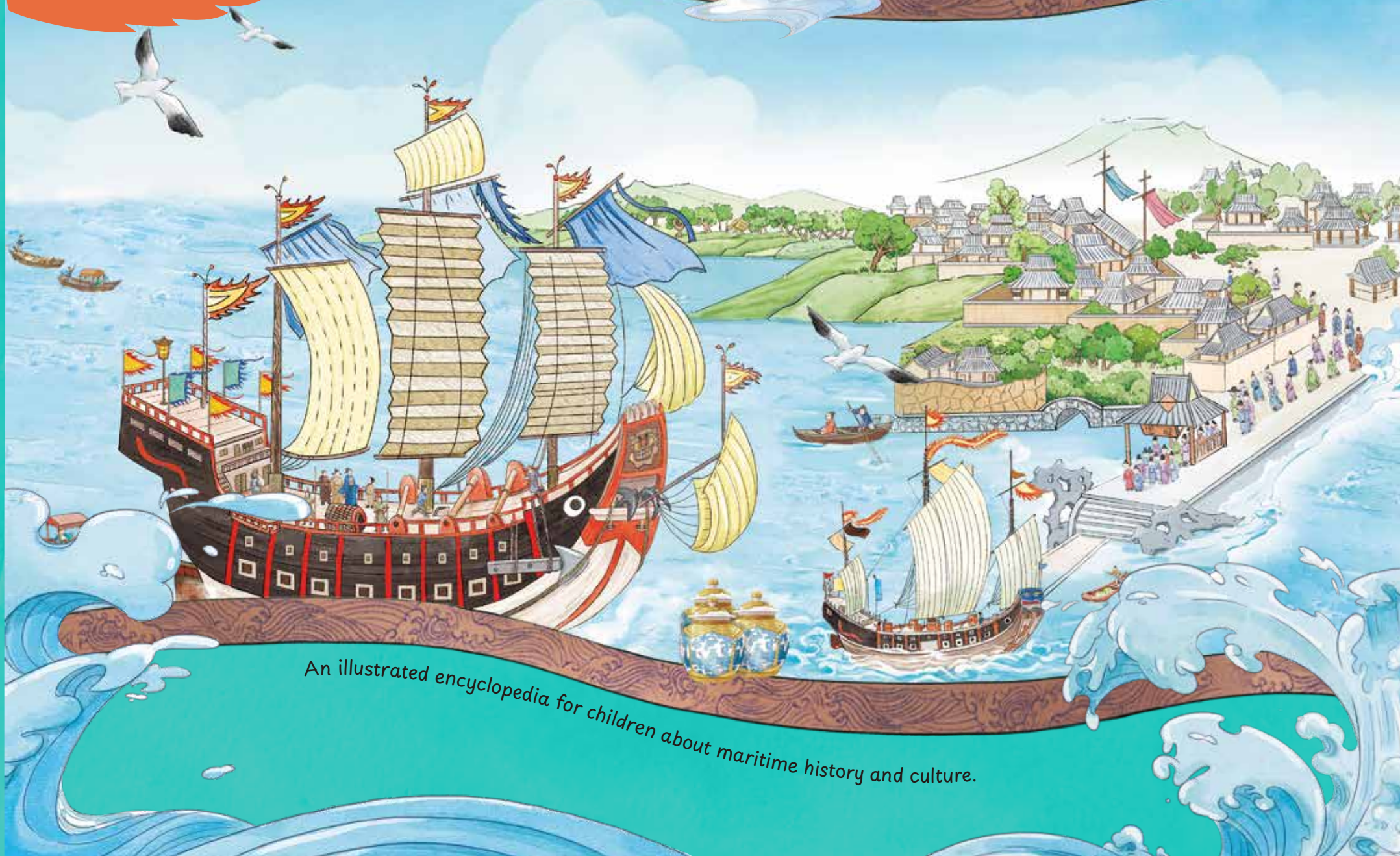


An illustration of a man in traditional Chinese clothing, including a black official's hat and a blue robe with a decorative panel on the chest. He is positioned in the upper left corner, looking towards the right.

The Story of Ships Across a Thousand Years on the Maritime Silk Road

The Voyage of the Investiture Ship



An illustrated encyclopedia for children about maritime history and culture.

Copyright – The Voyage of the investiture ship

Cataloging-in-Publication (CIP) Data

The Investiture Ship on a Diplomatic Mission / Chief Editor: China Maritime Museum,
Shanghai; compiled by Tongqu Publishing Co., Ltd. — Beijing: Posts & Telecom Press,
2025.

(A Thousand Years of “Ship” Tales along the Maritime Silk Road: An Illustrated
Children’s Encyclopedia of Maritime History and Culture)

ISBN: 978-614-495-744-8

Chief Editor: China Maritime Museum, Shanghai

Responsible Editor: Zhao Qian

Executive Editor: Wang He

Printing Supervisor: Shao Chao

Cover Design: Han Muhua

Typesetting and Layout: Duan Fang

Compiled by: Tongqu Publishing Co., Ltd.

Publisher: Posts & Telecom Press

All rights reserved. Any infringement will be prosecuted. If you discover any quality issues, please contact the Reader Services Department directly at 010-81054177.

Editorial Board

Consultant: Gao Menghe

Chair: Zhao Feng

Vice Chairs: Cong Jianguo, Wang Yu, Lu Wei, Fu Xiao

Editorial Board Members: Zeng Lingsong, Qi Yuguo, Shen Qiang, Huang Qianwei

Authors

Yu Yanyan, Zhou Shu, Zhou Tian, Wang Lingling, Chen Xueping,

Song Kai, Pan Dongyan, Liu Dandan, Yang Yang, Xiao Jie,

Lu Jiayu, Zhang Duoduo, Jiang Boren, Zhou Yinying, Jiang Xiaohan,

Zhou Min, Dong Ni, Du Liye.

Publishing Committee

Chair: Li Wen

Vice Chairs: Ma Jia, Shi Yan, Liu Youyi

Members:

Zhou Xiu, Dai Dongmei, Qi Jie, Zhao Qian, Song Fei, Ren Lixin,

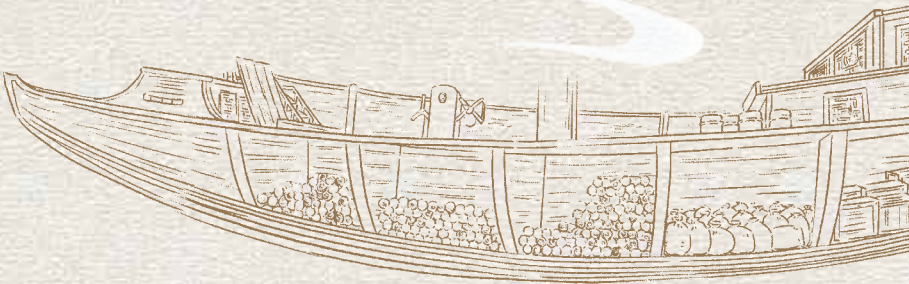
Guo Dandan, Zhao Xiaona, Shen Zhenyi, Zheng Mengyu, Wang He, Hu Hui,

Li Yao, Wang Ying, Zhang Fang, Shang Xuemin, Song Juan, Wu Min,

Shao Jiannan, Ye Mengjia, Zhao Yuhua, Wang Chuize, Wang Yuejing.

Acknowledgements

The Cultural Heritage Publishing Committee of the Chinese Cultural Relics Society.
China COSCO Shipping Corporation Limited.



Preface



Covering about 70 percent of the Earth's surface, the ocean is not only the cradle of life but also a vital channel through which civilizations have expanded and connected. China's relationship with the sea reaches far into antiquity. For thousands of years, its shipbuilding traditions have reflected remarkable ingenuity and legendary feats.

Let's travel back eight millennia to the rich wetlands of the lower Yangtze River—home to the unique Kuahuqiao culture. Among the fascinating relics left by this society, one discovery stands out: a perfectly preserved dugout canoe. This vessel represents one of the earliest examples of human maritime activity, silently witnessing our ancestors' curiosity and exploration of rivers, lakes, and seas.

From the Qin and Han dynasties onward, China's shipbuilding industry flourished. Advancements continued through the Sui, Tang, Song, and Yuan dynasties, reaching an apex during the Ming dynasty. By then, Chinese shipbuilding was globally unparalleled, supported by a rigorous and efficient administrative system. Techniques and craftsmanship achieved unprecedented sophistication. It was in this context that Zheng He set sail with his massive fleets, undertaking seven legendary voyages that left an enduring legacy in China's maritime history.

In honor of Zheng He's achievements and with approval from the State Council, the Ministry of Transport and the Shanghai Municipal Government established the China Maritime Museum—the country's first national museum dedicated to maritime heritage. Its mission is to celebrate China's maritime civilization, provide a platform for international exchange, support Shanghai's development as a global shipping hub, and inspire young people to engage with maritime culture. Here, visitors can trace the evolution of Chinese seafaring and navigational technology from ancient times to the present, witnessing the ongoing story of China's maritime development.

The year 2025 marks the 620th anniversary of Zheng He's voyage. To commemorate this milestone, A Children's Encyclopedia of the Thousand-Year History of the Maritime Silk Road was published. Consisting of four volumes, this book series explores shipbuilding, investiture missions, navigation technology, and cross-cultural encounters. Through engaging narratives, it recounts how China—building on the legacy of the overland Silk Road—extended a hand of friendship across the seas, demonstrating leading maritime technology and an indomitable spirit of exploration. Each volume opens a window onto nautical wonders, inviting young readers to set sail through history.

Special thanks are due to the authors and illustrators whose vibrant storytelling brings these ancient adventures to life. We invite young readers to embark on this journey with open eyes and curious hearts.

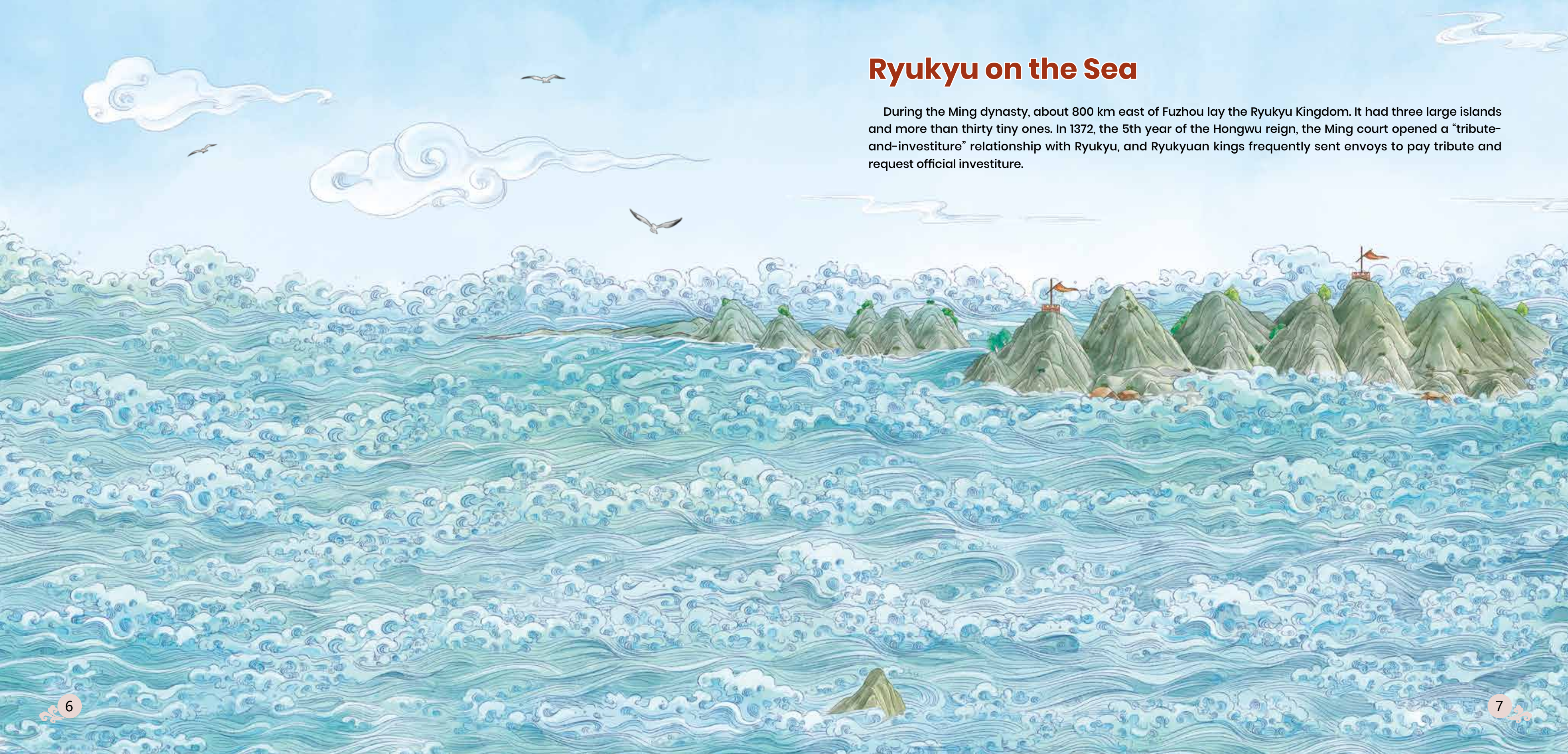
May every child who opens these books become a little navigator—discovering wonders and joy along the way, gathering courage for life's journey, and sailing boldly into the world's vast horizons!

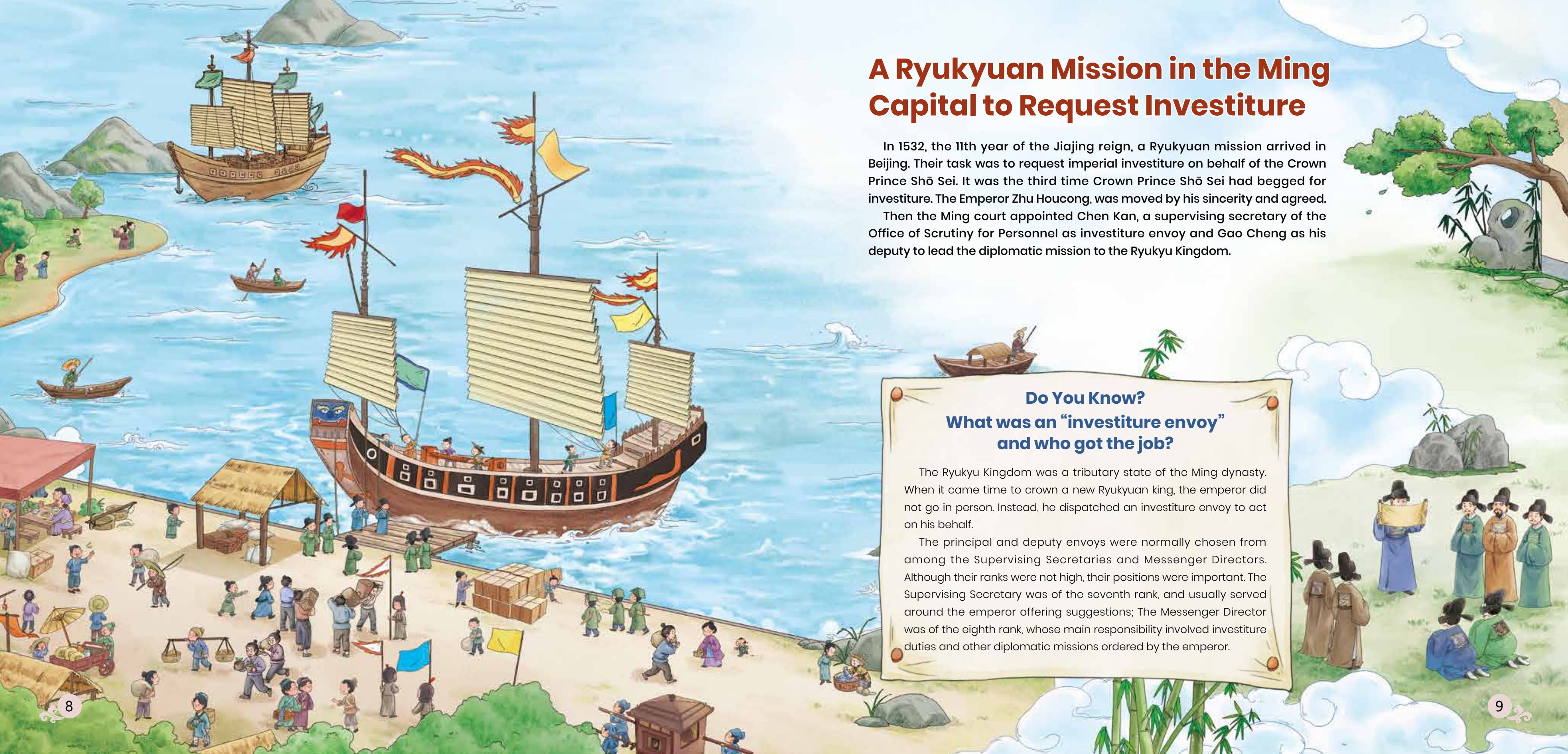
China Maritime Museum



Ryukyu on the Sea

During the Ming dynasty, about 800 km east of Fuzhou lay the Ryukyu Kingdom. It had three large islands and more than thirty tiny ones. In 1372, the 5th year of the Hongwu reign, the Ming court opened a “tribute-and-investiture” relationship with Ryukyu, and Ryukyuan kings frequently sent envoys to pay tribute and request official investiture.





A Ryukyuan Mission in the Ming Capital to Request Investiture

In 1532, the 11th year of the Jiajing reign, a Ryukyuan mission arrived in Beijing. Their task was to request imperial investiture on behalf of the Crown Prince Shō Sei. It was the third time Crown Prince Shō Sei had begged for investiture. The Emperor Zhu Houcong, was moved by his sincerity and agreed.

Then the Ming court appointed Chen Kan, a supervising secretary of the Office of Scrutiny for Personnel as investiture envoy and Gao Cheng as his deputy to lead the diplomatic mission to the Ryukyu Kingdom.

Do You Know? What was an “investiture envoy” and who got the job?

The Ryukyu Kingdom was a tributary state of the Ming dynasty. When it came time to crown a new Ryukyuan king, the emperor did not go in person. Instead, he dispatched an investiture envoy to act on his behalf.

The principal and deputy envoys were normally chosen from among the Supervising Secretaries and Messenger Directors. Although their ranks were not high, their positions were important. The Supervising Secretary was of the seventh rank, and usually served around the emperor offering suggestions; The Messenger Director was of the eighth rank, whose main responsibility involved investiture duties and other diplomatic missions ordered by the emperor.

From Seventh Rank to First Rank!

As investiture envoys represented the emperor himself, the selection of investiture envoys was exceptionally rigorous. Chen Kan, appointed as Chief investiture Envoy for this mission, served as a Supervising Secretary in the Office of Scrutiny for Personnel. His qualifications made him ideal: he was a respected scholar of outstanding intellect and impeccable character.

Upon receiving the imperial decree, Chen's first duty was to collect the imperial edict, traveling supplies, and ceremonial gifts bestowed by the emperor. To enhance the investiture envoys' authority during the investiture ceremony, both Chen Kan and Deputy Envoy Gao Cheng were granted 1st-rank ceremonial robes—a monumental promotion in protocol status. Chen's robe was embroidered with the Qilin whereas Gao's the Baize, which were normally reserved for dukes, marquises and imperial sons-in-law.

The Qilin
(a mythical monster,
symbolic Chinese)

Baizhe
(A mythical Chinese beast
that symbolizes wisdom
and knowledge of spirits).

Do You Know? The “food allowance” for investiture envoys

Besides bestowing official robes, the emperor also provided food for four members of an envoy's household. It was a practical consideration: the journey was long and the envoy would be away for months. The food allowance helped make the lives of the envoy's family members more comfortable and therefore the envoys could sail with less worry.

Master Shipbuilders at Fuzhou

Ming dynasty and Ryukyu Kingdom were linked by sea and the imperial investiture ship was a large wooden ocean-going ship specially designed for missions to the Ryukyu Kingdom. The next focus of Chen Kan and Gao Cheng's work was to oversee the construction of the investiture ship.

The investiture ship was often built at the shipyard in Fuzhou. To survive the long distance and the storms, it had to be big enough for cargo, strong enough for rough weather. Besides, it had to be grand enough to show off the national prestige.

After nearly a year of work, the investiture ship was finally finished to everyone's delight. The hull was sharp and narrow, with high, upturned bow and stern, and 5 tall masts reaching toward the sky. This design had a relatively deep draft, so it cut through deep water with less resistance, making it especially good for long ocean voyages. The hull was so steady that people standing on deck might hardly feel they were on a moving ship.

Do You Know? How sturdy was the investiture vessel?

According to the Record of the Mission to Ryukyu, the investiture ship that Chen Kan sailed to Ryukyu was about 50 meters long, 8.7 meters wide, and 4.3 meters deep. Inside were 23 compartments, and a two-story imperial cabin was built at the stern. Anti-wave shields were installed outside the front and rear cabins to protect the hull in wind and waves.

The wood for building the investiture ship was also carefully chosen—straight, light fir for the masts, tough ironwood for the rudder, and pine for the keel because it is thick and water-resistant.

I'm from Fuzhou and in charge of designing the shape of the hull.

I'm from Zhangzhou and responsible for making the ship sturdy.

Trade That Outlived the Ceremony

In addition to their diplomatic duties, Chen Kan and Gao Cheng were also entrusted with strengthening economic and trade relations between the two countries.

Before departure, the two envoys carefully listed and packed the goods they would bring to Ryukyu, especially prized local products from the Ming Court. Browsing through past records, Chen Kan remarked, "Previous envoys usually brought porcelain, lacquerware, and silk. What should we bring this time?" Gao Cheng replied, "The Ryukyu Kingdom is not rich in natural resources, and its handicraft industry is relatively underdeveloped. We should bring more everyday items to help improve their quality of life." Chen nodded in agreement. "That's right! Mutual communication and interaction are important. Let's also include a greater variety of porcelain, handicrafts, and textiles on this journey."

The items exported from the Ming Court to the Ryukyu Kingdom included:



Porcelain

blue-and-white bowls, plates, jars, stem-cups, flower-pots, incense burners, ect.



Cultural products

Huzhou brushes (referring to writing brushes produced in Huzhou, Zhejiang, which developed rapidly during the Ming Dynasty and became widely popular), Hangzhou Gold-decorated folding fans, etc.



Handicrafts

Lacquered plates, lacquered cups, etc. (The Ming Dynasty was a golden age for the development of lacquerware, characterized by high output, exquisite workmanship and a wide variety).



Textiles

Blue satin, plain satin, and other various colors of satin, silk and gauze; floral dyed cotton handkerchiefs; colorful silk handkerchiefs ect.

Supplies on Board

In addition to carrying trade and exchange goods between the two countries, it was also crucial to bring daily necessities, emergency supplies, ceremonial items for the investiture, and weapons for protection along the route. Before departure, Chen Kan and Gao Cheng boarded the ship to inspect everything.

Chen Kan picked up a rope on the deck and carefully examined its quality. When he saw the two imposing cannons, he nodded in satisfaction: “With these, we can feel more at ease.” Moving on to the compartment storing emergency supplies, Gao Cheng pointed to a farming tool and said, “These are for survival in case of shipwreck and stranding on a deserted island. Let’s hope we won’t need them this time.”

Amid the hustle and bustle, a soldier came over and whispered to Chen Kan. Chen Kan immediately gave a strict order: “Pass the order: to prevent overloading, no one is allowed to bring personal belongings over 100 jin (about 60 kg)!”

Sir, we’ve noticed someone carried overweight luggage.

The investiture mission took the solemn responsibility of paying homage to the late king and conferring the new one, so the yellow canopy, dragon flag, imperial scepter, the envoy’s title card, parasol, fans, and other ceremonial items that symbolize the majesty of the great nation must not be omitted.

“Food is the first necessity of the people,” so ample provisions were paramount. Water, grain, meat, wine, tea—none could be spared.

When sailing on the sea, every weapon counts. On the investiture ship, in addition to cold weapons like spears, bows and arrows, there were also two Frankish cannon (a type of breech-loading cannon made of iron), as well as protective equipment such as rattan shield, iron armor, and helmets.

The ocean is unpredictable. Whenever the hull gets a dent or scrape it had to be fixed on the spot. Therefore, items like hawsers, iron anchors, tung oil and oakum must be carried on board to be prepared for any potential danger.

The Mighty Investiture Delegation

The departing team assembled at the port, bustling with several hundred people. Besides the chief and deputy envoys and officials responsible for the investiture ceremony, there were other people with different roles.

The ship's crew numbered more than 140. Among them were the captain, who commanded the sailing; helmsmen, who steered the ship; sail handlers, who managed the sails; and anchor handlers, who handled the moorings—along with various other roles. Chen Kan pointed to a young man and said to Gao Cheng: "This is Xie Dunqi, a helmsman I specially recruited from Zhangzhou. He's been at sea since childhood and is incredibly experienced."

The accompanying soldiers were lining up—they were the main force ensuring the safety of the mission. Upon arriving in Ryukyu, they would also serve as the honor guard. Support personnel such as servants, cooks, clerks, and medical officers were equally indispensable. With clear divisions of labor, they ensured the orderly functioning of life on board.

Military Escorts

Primarily included battalion commanders, company commanders, and platoon leaders, who were responsible for protecting the envoy mission's safety.

Support Staff

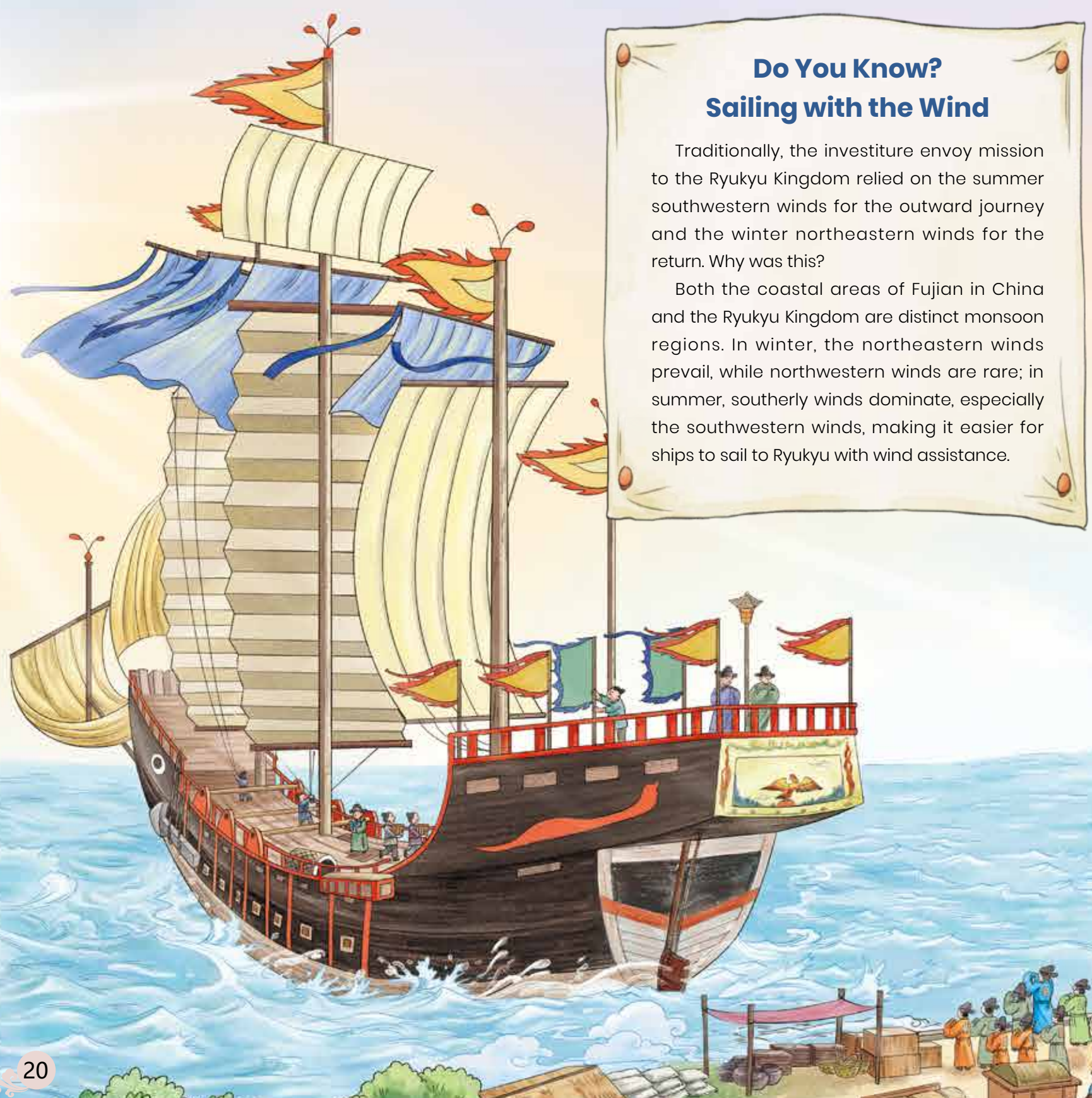
Mainly included interpreters, medical staff (physicians and surgeons), clerks, tailors, blacksmiths, cooks, ritual specialists, and others.

Ship Operators

Mainly included the captain, helmsmen, and riggers, most of whom hailed from Zhangzhou. The sailors from Zhangzhou made their living from the sea, and were highly skilled and resilient.

Do You Know? Where did the crew live?

The investiture ship had a spacious interior, typically divided into multiple cabins using bulkheads, generally ranging from 23 to 28 cabins. These compartments were divided into three layers from the bottom hold to the deck: the lowest layer was filled with stones or other heavy objects as ballast to stabilize the hull; the middle layer was the official cabin, where mission members lived; two additional layers were partitioned on both sides for attendants and servants to reside. In some cases, nearly 30 people had to share a single cabin.



Do You Know? Sailing with the Wind

Traditionally, the investiture envoy mission to the Ryukyu Kingdom relied on the summer southwestern winds for the outward journey and the winter northeastern winds for the return. Why was this?

Both the coastal areas of Fujian in China and the Ryukyu Kingdom are distinct monsoon regions. In winter, the northeastern winds prevail, while northwestern winds are rare; in summer, southerly winds dominate, especially the southwestern winds, making it easier for ships to sail to Ryukyu with wind assistance.

Setting Sail!

The crew boarded the ship in an orderly manner. All the sailors stood at his station and got ready. Chen Kan and Gao Cheng stood at the stern, bidding farewell to the Fujian officials who came to see them off. The investiture ship would depart from Fuzhou, home to the Fujian Maritime Trade Office, also the only port to the Ryukyu Kingdom.

At the captain's command, the entire crew sprang into action. Anchor handlers raised the iron anchor, and under the orders of the riggers, the crew hoisted the bamboo sails. The investiture ship slowly sailed away with the waves. Gazing at the vast sea ahead, Chen Kan expressed a mix of anticipation and concern: "Most of the records from earlier envoys to Ryukyu have been lost. Without them, our journey ahead feels uncertain." Gao Cheng immediately agreed: "Exactly, sir! Once we return safely, we must leave more records."



Food and Drinks at Sea

Leading several hundred people at sea, Chen Kan regarded daily meals as top priority. Since most of the crew were southerners, it was necessary to have an ample supply of rice. Additionally, the support staff brought pots of fresh ginger and vegetables to provide essential vitamins. Live chickens and ducks were also onboard, kept in pens as a source of fresh meat.



Do You Know?

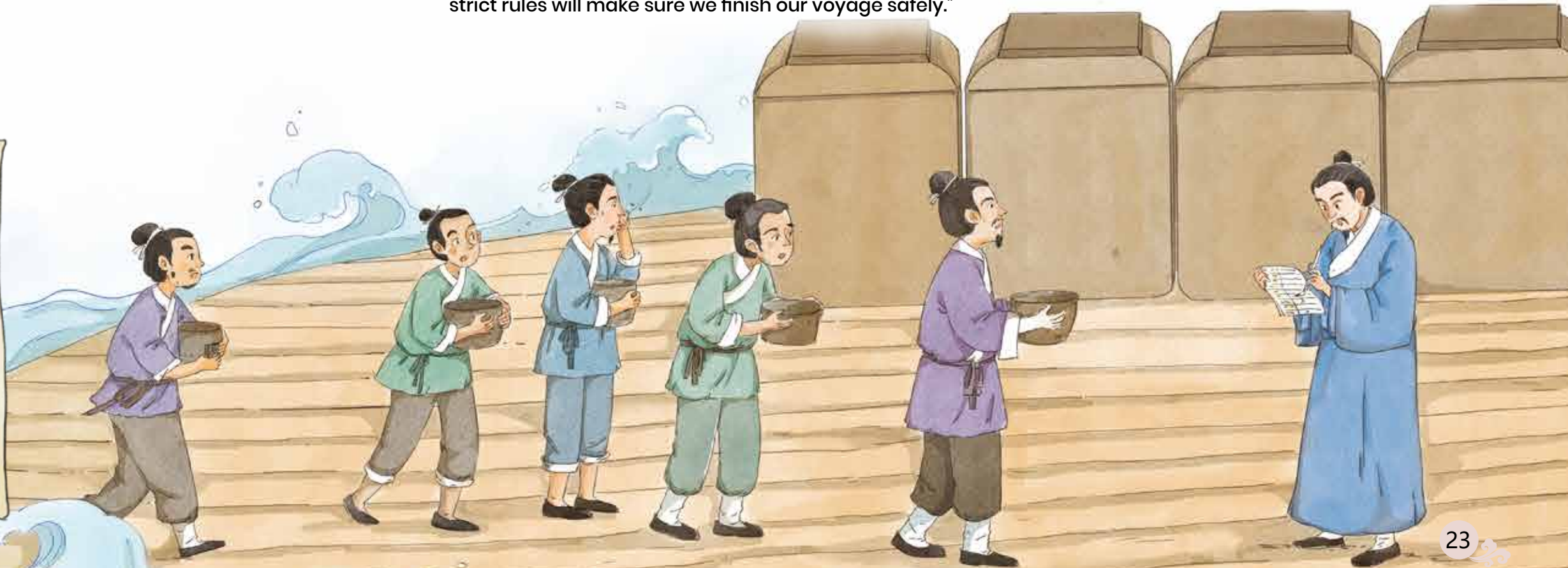
How Was Fresh Water Stored on the Ship?

During long voyages, fresh water could be stored in wooden barrels or larger wooden tanks. These tanks, holding significantly more water than barrels, were mostly installed at the bottom of the ship's hold. For large-scale maritime activities, there were also specialized water cabins and even dedicated water transport ships for storing and carrying fresh water.

The keys to the water tanks were kept by designated personnel, and regulations on freshwater usage were extremely strict. Only the investiture envoys were permitted to use freshwater for washing, while all others could use it only for drinking and cooking.



Beyond food, drinking water was another critical issue for everyone on the ship. Chen Kan often inspected the compartment where the water tanks were stored. One day, he arrived just as everyone was lining up for water. The crew members brought their own buckets and name tags to retrieve their allocated water. Pleased with the orderly process, Chen Kan said, "You may get water only twice a day, with only one small bucket each time. It's too little indeed. But on the wide, wide ocean, fresh water is extremely precious. Only strict rules will make sure we finish our voyage safely."



Wonderful Life at Sea

Life aboard the ship was vibrant and lively. A Fujian sailor skilled in fishing had just caught a big fish, ready to improve everyone's meal while the music troupe on board began playing a new tune. The idle crew members sang along to the rhythm. The ship's chief cook was busy managing simple stoves, stir-frying meals for hundreds. Despite the rough waves, the crew managed to serve hot food at every meal. Skilled pastry chefs also contributed delightful treats, adding sweetness to life at sea.



Do You Know? Special Guests Aboard

To enrich the life of the envoys at sea, the mission was also accompanied by a diverse group of guests. Among them were master calligraphers and painters, skilled chess players and music troupe, who provided artistic companionship and entertainment throughout the voyage.

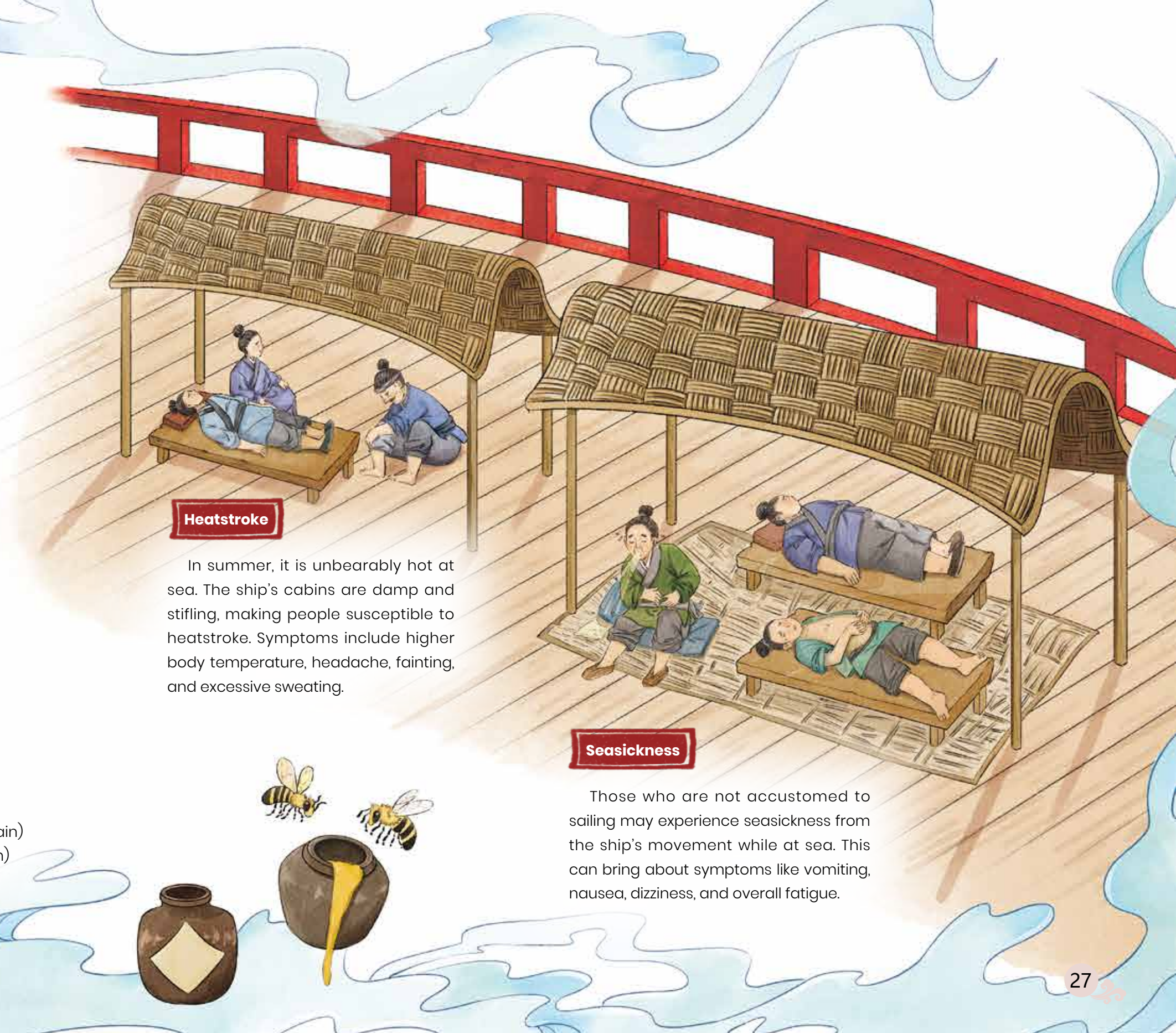


What If Someone Got Sick?

The voyage took place in summer, with constant sun and wind. The cramped living conditions soon led to seasickness and heatstroke among many crew members. Chen Kan grew increasingly worried and urged the medical staff to treat everyone with utmost effort.

Helmsman Xie Dunqi suggested: "Sir, if we set up shaded canopies on the deck, the crew could enjoy the sea breeze without baking in the heat—and it would help reduce the risk of heatstroke." Chen Kan, delighted by the idea, immediately ordered the crew to put them up.

It was then that Gao Cheng noticed the multitude of lesions marring Xie Dunqi's weathered skin. Upon learning that these wounds were the result of perpetual saltwater spray encountered during his duties at the helm, Gao Cheng instructed the medical staff, Wu Niansan, to provide treatment. Wu, a man of considerable expertise, prepared a medicinal bath using a time-tested prescription that included 0.5 jin (300 grams) of honey, 30 jin (18 kilograms) of diluted wine, and 0.5 jin of medicinal herbs like Chinese angelica and siler root. The remedy worked wonders—Xie quickly recovered.



In summer, it is unbearably hot at sea. The ship's cabins are damp and stifling, making people susceptible to heatstroke. Symptoms include higher body temperature, headache, fainting, and excessive sweating.

Those who are not accustomed to sailing may experience seasickness from the ship's movement while at sea. This can bring about symptoms like vomiting, nausea, dizziness, and overall fatigue.

Students who “Ride the Waves”

During the voyage, Chen Kan and Gao Cheng often chatted with the Ryukyu navigator to better understand the Ryukyu Kingdom.

The Ryukyu navigator said, “In recent years, many Ryukyuan students went to study in Ming China. They’ve learned many skills—agriculture, stone carving, calendar making, fireworks, shipbuilding, and more. Thanks to them, we had higher harvest yield, sturdier ships and better life.”

“Not only that,” he continued excitedly, “you’ll see when you arrive—our houses, the characters we write, even the rituals we follow are very much like the Ming’s. All thanks to those students.”

Chen Kan nodded in agreement: “They are bridges of cultural exchange!”

Farming Skills

Students who studied in the Ming Empire brought back advanced farming skills—like how to grow crops, fruits, and vegetables—along with better farm tools to the Ryukyu Kingdom. All these increased the output of crops in the Ryukyu Kingdom.

Shipbuilding Technology

During the Ming Dynasty, China excelled in large-scale, advanced shipbuilding. This expertise attracted the Ryukyu Kingdom to have its ships repaired or built across Fujian. Through funding ship construction and purchases, Ryukyu gradually acquired and brought these sophisticated techniques back to its own islands.



Do You Know? Ryukyu Students in Ming China

Every time the Ryukyu Kingdom sent an official mission to the Ming Dynasty—whether to seek imperial recognition or offer tribute—they would also send a group of students along to study in China. Usually, three to six students joined these missions, staying for about three to five years to complete their studies.

These students fell into two categories: those funded by the government and those who paid their own way. The government-sponsored students, known as “state scholars”, studied at the Imperial Academy—the highest institution of learning in the Ming Empire—with all expenses covered by the court. The self-funded students, called “diligent learners”, had to finance their education themselves. Not surprisingly, most of them came from wealthy families.

Stone Carving

In the Ming Dynasty, stone carving was widely used to decorate all kinds of buildings. You could find these detailed carvings on houses, temples, pavilions, towers, and ceremonial gates. They featured beautiful patterns like flowers, birds, lotus blossoms, peonies, as well as lions, clouds, and deer.

Fireworks Production

Fireworks in the Ming Dynasty were made from materials such as saltpeter, sulfur, lime, and gunpowder, featuring hundreds of designs including flowers, plants, human figures, and animals.

The Datong Calendar

The Datong Calendar served as the official calendar system of the Ming Dynasty and was the longest-enduring traditional calendar throughout the era. It played a significant role in facilitating foreign-oriented publicity and exchange during the Ming period.



Do You Know?

What Was the "Envoy's Residence"?

The Envoy's Residence was carefully designed, from its outer appearance to its interior layout. It looked like a Ming-era government office, surrounded with fences. Inside, there were four rooms on both the east and west gates. Yellow flags fluttered on the poles outside the rooms, representing the "investiture mission". They looked truly impressive!

This residence served many purposes, like hosting diplomatic meetings and facilitating trade, making it an important site that symbolized the friendly relationship between Ming China and the Ryukyu Kingdom.

Arrival at Naha Port

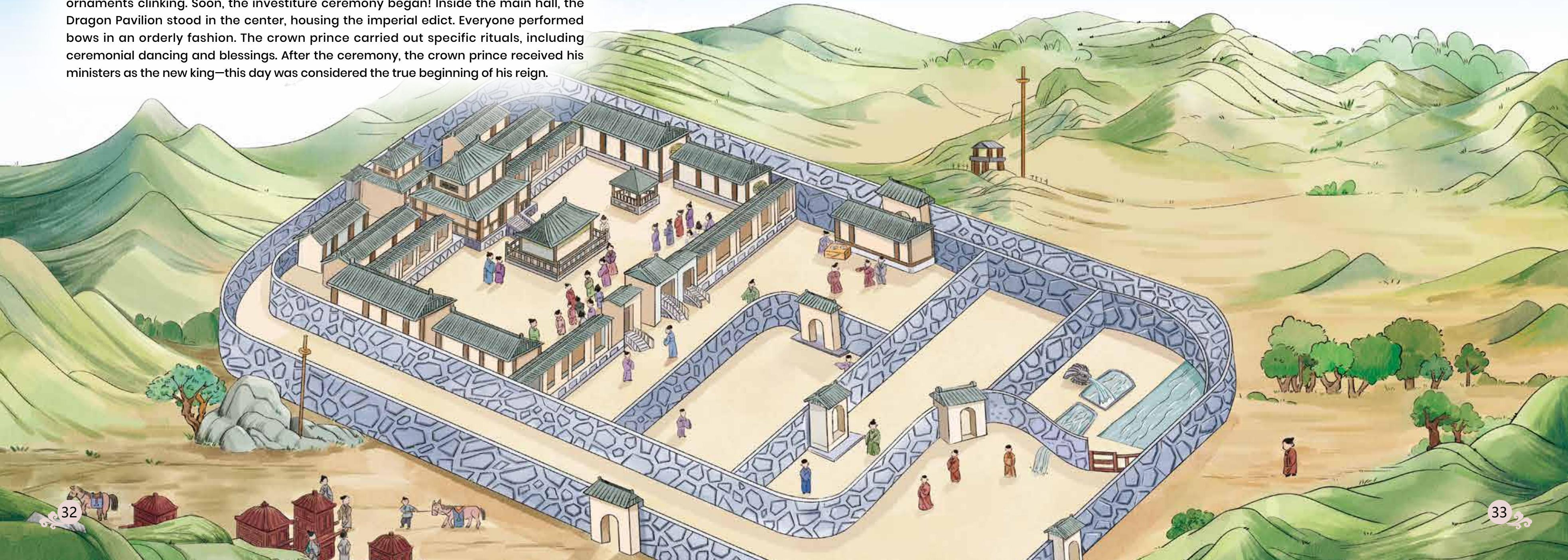
After more than 20 days at sea, the investiture ship finally dropped anchor at Naha Port in the Ryukyu Kingdom.

Chen Kan noticed a pavilion on the shore with the large inscription "Welcoming Grace" (Ying'en). Ryukyuan officials had long been waiting inside. After the officials performed the ritual of five bows and three kowtows before the imperial edict was placed in the Dragon Pavilion, they all headed to the "Envoy's Residence". Chen Kan had heard of it—it was both the official residence of the Ming envoys in Ryukyu and a venue for trade. The open space in front of the hall had already become a bustling marketplace.

The Investiture Ceremony Begins!

On the day of investiture, a solemn hush had fallen over the entire city, within the walls and beyond. Led by Chen Kan, the mission processed forward, joining the Ryukyuan officials who had gathered at dawn outside the Envoy's Residence. Together, they moved toward the main hall of the grand royal palace.

Along the way, the long procession moved with banners fluttering and ceremonial ornaments clinking. Soon, the investiture ceremony began! Inside the main hall, the Dragon Pavilion stood in the center, housing the imperial edict. Everyone performed bows in an orderly fashion. The crown prince carried out specific rituals, including ceremonial dancing and blessings. After the ceremony, the crown prince received his ministers as the new king—this day was considered the true beginning of his reign.



Completion of Record of Missions to Ryukyu

In September, as the northeastern winds began to sweep across the sea, the investiture mission prepared to return to the Ming Empire after their stay of over three months.

This experience brought Chen Kan profound insights. As he had wished before departure, he soon completed the book *Record of the Mission to Ryukyu* upon returning home. It detailed everything from his appointment as envoy to his experiences in Ryukyu, leaving invaluable knowledge for future generations. It was the first comprehensive record of an investiture mission in Chinese history.

From then on, many subsequent envoys also began documenting their missions. These records have become precious historical materials in the history of ancient Chinese maritime exploration.



Chronicle of Investiture Missions to Ryukyu

Throughout the Ming and Qing dynasties, investing Ryukyu's kings with imperial titles was an important diplomatic practice. Over five centuries, the Chinese court dispatched 23 investiture missions to Ryukyu, involving 43 envoys—27 during the Ming (15 missions) and 16 during the Qing (8 missions).

1372: Tributary Relations Formalized

The Ming court presented Ryukyu with the Datong Calendar, symbolizing imperial recognition of the Ryukyu king's legitimacy.

1392: Ming-Ryukyu Relations Enhanced

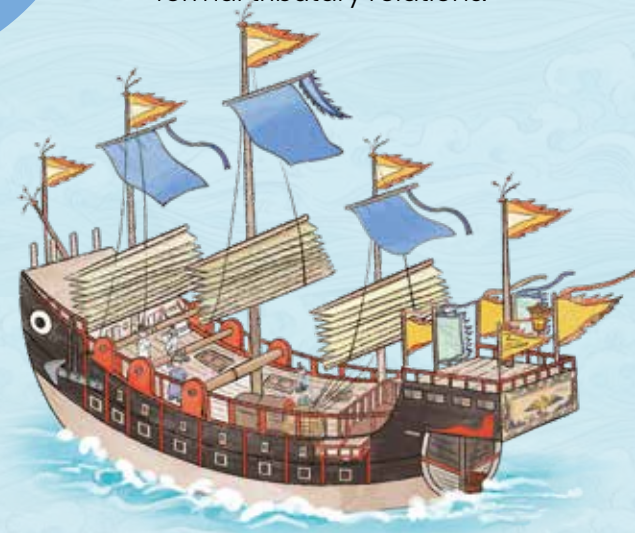
Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang sent 36 Fujianese families skilled in navigation to Ryukyu, facilitating maritime exchanges. This was the first recorded large-scale, state-organized emigration from China.

1392: Ryukyu Students in Ming China

Ryukyu began sending young scholars to study at the Ming Imperial Academy, starting a tradition of sending students abroad to Ming.

1372: Ryukyu's First Tribute to the Ming Court

Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang sent envoy Yang Zai to Ryukyu. In December that year, Ryukyu began paying tribute to the Ming court, initiating formal tributary relations.



1404: The Ming's First Investiture of Ryukyu

The Ming court dispatched Shi Zhong as chief envoy to formally invest the Ryukyu king, establishing the official investiture system.

1472: Fuzhou Became Sole Official Port for Ryukyu Trade

China's Office of Maritime Trade moved from Quanzhou to Fuzhou, making Fuzhou the only official port for trade and diplomacy with Ryukyu.

1689: New Rules for Ryukyu Tribute Ships

The Qing government allowed Ryukyu's tribute-receiving ships to trade tax-free and increased crew permits to 200 people.



1534: Chen and Gao's Mission to Ryukyu

The Ming court appointed Chen Kan as chief envoy and Gao Cheng as deputy envoy to the Ryukyu Kingdom. Chen later wrote Record of Missions to Ryukyu, the first detailed account of imperial investiture ceremonies.

1633: Ming's Final Investiture Mission to Ryukyu

The Ming court sent Du Sance and Yang Lun as last envoys to Ryukyu. Their imperial ship was the largest investiture vessel ever recorded.

1662: Qing's First Mission to Ryukyu

The Qing government appointed Zhang Xueli, Deputy Director of the Office of Scrutiny for Military Personnel, as the chief envoy and Wang Gai, an Emissary of the Bureau of State Ceremonial, as the Deputy Envoy, to the Ryukyu Kingdom, continuing the tributary relationship.

1866: Qing China's Final Mission to Ryukyu

The Qing court sent its last imperial envoys to Ryukyu, and the investiture tradition ended after that.

The Voyage of the Investiture Ship

Promoting maritime culture and
sharing Chinese civilization

