

# China, Kenya to search for ancient Chinese wrecks

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(AP) -- China and Kenya plan to search for ancient Chinese ships wrecked almost 600 years ago off Africa's east coast.

An agreement was signed for a three-year project funded by China's Commerce Ministry to explore waters near the popular tourist towns of Malindi and Lamu, the official Xinhua News Agency reported Friday.

Exploration work will be conducted for up to three months each year, with the first group of Chinese archaeologists due to arrive as early as July, Xinhua said.

The sunken [ships](#) are believed to have been part of a massive fleet led by Ming [dynasty](#) admiral Zheng He that reached Malindi in 1418. Kenyan lore has long told of shipwrecked Chinese sailors settling in the region and marrying local women.

Between 1405 and 1433, Zheng He - whose name is also spelled Cheng Ho - led armadas with scores of junks and thousands of sailors on voyages to promote trade and recognition of the new dynasty, which had taken power in 1368.

Zheng's seven voyages marked a high point in Chinese power. But imperial rulers soon lost interest in the outside world and canceled further exploration more than a half century before Columbus reached the New World.

Zheng's story has been heavily promoted by China's government in recent years as evidence of China's tradition of nonaggression abroad, although historical records show the treasure fleets carried significant firepower and participated in at least three major military actions.

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