

JUNKS!

A **junk** is a type of Chinese sailing ship with fully battened sails. There are two types of junk in China: the Northern junk, which developed from Chinese river boats, and the Southern junk, which developed from Austronesian ship designs, examples of which have

been trading with the Eastern Han dynasty since the 2nd century AD. They continued to evolve in the later dynasties, and were predominantly used by Chinese traders throughout Southeast Asia. They were found, and in lesser numbers are still found, throughout Southeast Asia and India, but primarily in China. Found more broadly today is a growing number of modern recreational junk-rigged sailboats. Chinese junks referred to many types of coastal or river ships. They were usually cargo ships, pleasure boats, or houseboats. They vary greatly in size and there are significant regional variations in the type of rig, however they all employ fully battened sails.

Chinese ships were essentially river-bound before the Song dynasty. However, large Austronesian trading ships docking in Chinese seaports with as many as four sails were recorded by scholars as early as the Han Dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE). They were booked by Chinese Buddhist pilgrims for passage to Southern India and Sri Lanka. The 3rd century book *Strange Things of the South* by Wan Chen describes one of these Austronesian ships as being capable of 600-700 people together with more than 250-1000 tons. The ships could be more than 50 meters in length and had a freeboard of 5.2–7.8 meters. When seen from above they resemble covered galleries.

Southern Chinese junks were based on keeled and multi-planked Austronesian jong (known as *po* by the Chinese, from Javanese or Malay *perahu* - large ship)., sharing such characteristics as the V-shaped, double-ended hull with a keel, and using timbers of tropical origin. This is different from northern Chinese junks, which are developed from flat bottomed riverine boats. The northern Chinese junks had flat bottoms, no keel, no frames (only water-tight bulkheads), transom stern and stem, built out of pine or fir wood, and planks fastened with iron nails or clamps.



The trading dynasty of the Song developed the first junks based on Southeast Asian ships. By this era they also have adopted the Malay junk sail. The ships of the Song, both mercantile and military, became the backbone of the navy of the following Yuan dynasty. In particular, the Mongol invasions of Japan (1274–84), as well as the Mongol invasion of Java (both failed), essentially relied on recently acquired Song naval capabilities. Worcester estimates that Yuan junks were 36 ft in beam and over 100 ft long. In general, they had no keel, stempost, or sternpost. They did have centerboards, and watertight bulkheads to strengthen the hull, which added great weight. Further excavations showed that this type of vessel was common in the 13th century. By using the ratio between number of soldiers and ships in both invasions, it can be concluded that each ship carried 20-70 men.

The enormous dimensions of the Chinese ships of the Medieval period are described in Chinese sources and are confirmed by Western travelers to the East, such as Marco Polo, Ibn Battuta and Niccolò da Conti.

From the mid-15th to early 16th century, all Chinese maritime trading was banned under the Ming Dynasty. The shipping and shipbuilding knowledge acquired during the Song and Yuan dynasties gradually declined during this period.

The largest junks ever built were possibly those of Admiral Zheng He, for his

for his expeditions in the Indian Ocean (1405 to 1433).

Chinese junks were used extensively in Asian trade during the 16th and 17th century, especially to Southeast Asia and to Japan, where they competed with Japanese Red Seal Ships, Portuguese carracks and Dutch galleons. Richard Cocks, the head of the English trading factory in Hirado, Japan, recorded that 50 to 60 Chinese junks visited Nagasaki in 1612 alone. These junks were usually three masted, and averaging between 200 and 800 tons in size, the largest ones having around 130 sailors, 130 traders, and sometimes hundreds of passengers.

Large, ocean-going junks played a key role in Asian trade until the 19th century. One of these junks, *Keying*, sailed from China around the Cape of Good Hope to the United States and England between 1846 and 1848. Many junks were fitted out with carronades and other weapons for naval or piratical uses. These vessels were typically called "war junks" or "armed junks" by Western navies which began entering the region more frequently in the 18th century. The British, Americans and French fought several naval battles with war junks in the 19th century, during the First and Second Opium Wars.

In 1955, six young men sailed a Ming dynasty-style junk from Taiwan to San Francisco. The four-month journey aboard the *Free China* was captured on film and their arrival into San Francisco made international front-page news. *[Wikipedia]*

