Voyages in the Ming Dynasty

The film *Emperor of the Seas* focuses on the detailed life of Zheng He and Emperor Yongle, chronicling their lives and following the success of the seven voyages of the Ming Dynasty. Another film on the same subject, *1421: The Year China Discovered America?*, is not so thorough. While *1421* does have some brief focus on Zheng He, the main points of the film concentrate around large claims—occasionally making generalizations and speculations that have very little to do with what actually was relevant to China at the time. An explanation of these Chinese voyages are summarized in sweeping generalizations, narrowing on only the minutest details. From *1421*, gaining much perspective of the real men who led and were responsible for these voyages becomes close to impossible. Instead, the focus diverts to other key players whose significance in the voyages is highly controversial. The scattered focus, wild speculations, and grandiose claims make finding a cohesive history of the Ming dynasty’s maritime ventures extremely difficult. A concentration on the social history (i.e. the life of Zheng He and the exploits of Emperor Yongle) of the Ming Dynasty voyages rather than a