

Zachary Wong

Dr. Lyndell O'Hara

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Response to Crash Course: 15th Century Mariners

The presentation of the 15th Century Mariners by John Green highlights three individual successful mariners, Columbus, Vasco da Gama, and Zheng He, each in his own aspects in terms of objective and legacy. We shall compare and contrast the three based on these terms presented in the short video.

Objectives. Simply by the size of his fleet, little would doubt that Zhang He's objectives were to project Imperial China dominance of maritime trade in the Indo-Pacific regions. As a tribute collecting fleet, Zhang He's main interest was probably not in the creation of trade networks, as those already existed in the area long before he sailed south. Vasco da Gama, and Columbus in that extent, had very different objectives. As John Green repeats, "Gold and Christians" were the two things that Portuguese and Spainards were in search of, their goals were to open trade routes that were previously unknown to their patron countries respectively in order to bring wealth and manpower in form of converted natives.

Legacy. All three of these mariners deserve to be considered great in all senses of the word. Da Gama pioneered the route around the Cape of Good Hope and further connected to India. Columbus was able to travel to and from the American continent with minimal

technological assistance, which is not a small feat in the 1500's. Zhang He's massive fleet sailed from east Asia to east Africa, introducing a variety of African animals to the far east.

Again, all three are Great in their own sense, but as John Green states in the video, if you prefer administrative competence against ill advised adventure, then Zhang's itineraries would be greatly appreciated. I would agree with Green's assessment that shift of focus in Chinese internal politics shortens the age of Chinese maritime dominance. Yet, Zhang's legacy still lives on albeit its lack of endurance.