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HIS 113: World Civilization

21 April 2023

### Research

The Europeans, starting in the late 15th century, were driven by a combination of factors, including a “desire for new trade routes to the East, a thirst for exploration and adventure, a quest for wealth and glory, and a mission to spread Christianity.” This led to a period of intense maritime activity, with “explorers like Christopher Columbus, Vasco da Gama, and Ferdinand Magellan” making significant voyages of discovery that forever changed the world. China, on the other hand, had a long history of maritime activity that predated Europe's age of exploration. The Chinese undertook a series of expeditions led by the famous admiral Zheng He. These expeditions were motivated more by a desire to establish Chinese prestige and expand China's sphere of influence, rather than by a search for new trade routes or a religious mission. China's exploration of the Americas would have likely been very different from Europe's for a few reasons. The distance between China and the Americas is significantly greater than that between Europe and the Americas, meaning that any Chinese exploration of the region would have been a more daunting prospect for the Europeans. The Chinese were not primarily driven by a desire to establish new trade routes or spread Christianity. While the Europeans were often motivated by these goals in their exploration, the Chinese were more interested in establishing their own prestige and influence. Any Chinese expedition to the Americas would likely have been more focused on establishing Chinese power in the region, rather than on economic or religious gain. In terms of the actual discovery of the Aztec Empire, it is possible that the Chinese could have established contact with the Aztecs and developed some level of trade or diplomatic relations with them. It is unlikely that this would have led to the same level of cultural exchange and conquest that occurred when the Europeans made contact with the Aztecs. This is partly because the Chinese were less interested in spreading their own culture or religion, and partly because the Aztecs had a very different societal structure and

worldview than the Europeans. It is possible that the Chinese could have established a friendly relationship with the Aztecs, but it is unlikely that they would have sought to conquer or assimilate them in the way that the Europeans did.