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HIS113

24 April 2023

Compare and Contrast: 15th Century Mariners

John Green presents a very clear representation of three historic mariners of the 15th century, their countries of origin, their motives, and their accomplishments. Zheng He, Christopher Columbus, and Vasco de Gama certainly had two main things in common: their voyages sought to accomplish patriotic exploits and gain wealth. Additional motivations are where the three sailors begin to digress.

Although Christopher Columbus is the most famous of the two, he was not the most skilled nor the most successful. Columbus' voyage is famous because of the lasting impact that it had on the entire world, as he shed light on a virtually unexplored/uncharted area of the world – at least according to the national superpowers of the day. Columbus' goals under the auspices of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella were to acquire wealth for Spain and make conversions of the natives for the sake of the Church; he did not accomplish the former and accomplished the latter quite infamously. Needless to say, Columbus is well-remembered, however, he is not remembered particularly fondly. Despite his navigational skills and determination on his goal, he simply did not hit the mark.

On the other hand, Vasco de Gama was successful in his goals of establishing a Portuguese trade route to India and paving the way for trade ports to be planted along the coasts of the Indian Ocean. This brought much wealth and rapport to Portugal and territories. Since

Portugal did not have many natural resources, this was a huge shift for the country and truly helped to establish its success. After this, it seemed that Portugal's crusade-centered goal to find an ally in order for them to drive out more muslims became secondary.

The Chinese were actually more identified with the muslims, so the whole mission of conversion was not a motive of theirs at all. Navigator Zheng He sought to establish rapport and maintain a sense of universal respect for China as a nation and empire, similarly to Vasco da Gama. However for Zheng He, it was a bit easier: the emperor at the time was very focused on building this respect and desire for other countries to trade with China, so he funded Zheng He's 300-ship fleet. Additionally, China has already established itself as a trading superpower and was positioned right above some of the most lucrative trading posts. Overall, China's main goal was to stay on top of the trade network and have all the countries go through them for their desired resources. This was a very successful endeavor, until it was no longer a priority.

All in all, each set of voyages had its weaknesses, but also its strengths. We can value each historic figure and their feats respectively, while also seeing how each of their accomplishments directed the tides of history even to this day.