Why Europe, Not China

Read your assigned section and fill out the corresponding graphic organizer.

**Why not China?**

To answer this question we must first consider why China did not take advantage of its leadership in the exploration of the world in the 1400’s. By 1433 China had the most sophisticated navy in the world and had led the way in global exploration. By traveling to India, Southwest Asia, and the eastern coast of Africa the Chinese sent a clear message about their technological superiority. This leadership came about because of a confluence of two related factors.

The first factor was religious. Confucianism, which had long been an influential presence in China, required its adherents to honor their family, relationships with others and with the government. Rituals and duties characterized this belief system. Confucians believe that it was wrong for a man to make a distant voyage while his parents were alive. In addition, the Confucian responsibility for maintain relationship with the family’s remains made it difficult for Chinese seaman to leave home. In the early 1430’s new leadership in China re-instituted Confucian values and stopped the overseas voyages. In 1476, the Chinese government banned shipping, ordered the destruction of ship logs, dismantled the navy and made sailing capital crime. Unlike Europe, which was subdivided into autonomous states with independent decision making, China was one empire. A decision made by the emperor affected the entire empire. When the emperor banned all ocean related activities the entire Chinese overseas enterprise came to a halt.

Finally, China’s ethnocentric views led them to feel that they were the center of world civilization and that all other states were simply suppliers of tribute and homage. This belief manifested itself in governmental policy that called for isolation from the barbarians in the rest of the world. The control of the government by Confucian scholars heighted the desire to isolate china from the rest of the world.

**Why not Europe?**

Nations in Europe possessed the political flexibility and economic motivations that allowed it to surpass China in the 1400’s. First, was a European desire for wealth. Unlike the Ottoman Empire and Indian Ocean traders who had control of trade routes and access to good, Europeans were priced out of the overland markets and had to seek alternative routes. The desire for spices and luxury goods from Asia pushed European nations to explore sea routes around Africa to the east and to the west.

A second, motivation was a desire to spread the faith. Europeans felt a sacred duty to spread the faith of Christianity and convert others. The opportunity to interact with new cultures or other faiths encouraged Europeans to push beyond their boundaries. Christian leaders felt an obligation to convert Muslims as well as other pagans throughout the world.

Also, many European nations, out of desire to spread the faith and accumulate wealth, made overseas exploration a governmental priority. Government sponsored trading companies and capital investment provided the entrepreneurial push to explore.

Another motivation was simple curiosity. The Renaissance drive for knowledge moved Europeans beyond their borders to gain geographical, scientific, and spiritual knowledge. The tales of Marco Polo and numerous myths regarding the world outside Europe fed the collective curiosity of the region and facilitated overseas exploration.