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Marco Polo, Spreader of Technology and Igniter of Interest

Imagine living in a world whose technology was set back ten, fifty, or even one hundred years. Without the travels of Marco Polo, Europe would have never been intrigued by the eastern world. A Venetian explorer born in 1254, Marco Polo has a positive influence on humanity by bringing advancements made in the Asia and by igniting an interest in Asia

Polo had brought back many objects that piqued European interest in the world east of them after spending about twenty years employed by Kublai Klan. Some items were porcelain, silk, jade, spices, noodles, and ivory. One important item introduced to the European world was the Chinese compass. Navigating the land and sea became easier and expeditions could go further because there was a common reference point or direction to use while reading and making maps. This also promoted trade. Another important item was the introduction of paper, paper currency, and an early form of printing. Paper would enable Europeans to utilize the printing press many years later. Polo commented on the efficiency of paper money as it was easier for merchants to carry around compared to lugging around metal coins, and merchants could use it to purchase anything where it was recognized as money. In addition, printing in Europe led to increased information and literacy rates. A third important item was gunpowder. Without gunpowder, the European explorers that explored the Americas would have to fair without guns. Some of the indigenous populations of the Americas that encountered the explorers attributed their guns as evidence that the explorers were god-like and the guns helped in conquering the Americas. The concept of guns was already known by the Japanese due to their close proximity to China, but the advanced firearms of the Portuguese were bought by a lord of a Japanese island, Tanegashima Tokitaka, in 1543, which saw increased usage during the Sengoku period. In Professor Derk Bodde's "China's Gift to the West," it is mentioned that "Without paper and printing, for example, we should still be living in the Middle Ages. Without gunpowder... the armored knights of medieval Europe might still reign supreme in their moated castles, and our society might still be held in feudal servitude," (Bodde). Therefore, without China's advancements, Europe would be far behind.

Polo sparked an interest that contributed to the age of exploration starting in the early 15th century to the 17th century. While Polo's tales of China were originally thought of as fairy tales, overtime it began to pique interest in China's wealth. Three years after Marco returned to Venice, he was commanding a galley in a war against Genoa when he was then imprisoned in a Genoese prison. One of his prison mates was Rusichello of Pisa, a writer of Romances. Polo dictated his travels as Ruischello wrote them down. The writing was known as The Travels of Marco Polo, then was rewritten by Polo himself. The writings contained accounts of China, the Mongol empire, and customs of India and Africa. Knowledge of Polo's travels spread and was eventually stored in libraries by the fifteenth century. According to the Europeana blog by Beth, Christopher Columbus's source of motivation for sailing all the way west as a method to hit the eastern lands of Asia was none other than Polo's book. (Beth). Historians today may doubt that it was the motivation, but rather inspiration because the knowledge in Polo's book was common knowledge at that time, but at some point in Columbus's voyage for Portugal, he did request for Polo's book. Therefore, tales of new riches was the fuel Polo spilled to ignite interest in the Asian world.

Thus, Marco Polo's contributions to humanity have had positive effects. Without technology from China and tales of Asia's riches, Europe would have been stuck in the Middle Ages and colonial America would not exist.

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