

Marco Polo and His Book of Travels

HUMA1676

3 Credits

Fall 2025

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Course Description

Marco Polo is the world's most famous traveler and we all have heard something about him and his travels to China. Marco Polo stands for the first direct contact between Europe and China in the Age of the first Eurasian Globalization under the Mongol Empire, the model of East-West exchange. Yet everything known about him comes from his book, which was written more than 700 years ago and whose reliability has been often questioned. This course will introduce students to the text, his two authors and the wider historical context surrounding the travel and its written account. At the end of the course students will have acquired a deeper understanding of cultural exchange between Europe and China in the Middle Ages as well as in later periods, and know the answers to questions such as "Did Marco Polo go to China?" and "Did Marco Polo bring spaghetti back to Europe?".

Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

1. Analyze the cultural, economic, and political factors that shaped early travel and cultural encounters between East Asia and Europe.
2. Collaborate in groups on the analysis, discussion and evaluation of Marco Polo's travels and cultural encounters; and present the findings and arguments
3. Produce a critical narrative to communicate ideas about Marco Polo's travels and cultural encounters.

Assessment and Grading

This course will be assessed using criterion-referencing and grades will not be assigned using a curve. Detailed rubrics for each assignment are provided below, outlining the criteria used for evaluation.

Assessments:

Assessment Task	Contribution to Overall Course grade (%)	Due date
Mid-Term	35%	Week 8
Group Presentation	35%	Week 12 and 13
Course participation	30%	Weeks 1-13

* Assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be released within two weeks of the due date.

Mapping of Course ILOs to Assessment Tasks

Assessed Task	Mapped ILOs	Explanation
Mid-Term	ILO1, ILO3	<p>Students are required to write an essay (1,500-2,000 words) that address the issues and debates related to Marco Polo and East-West cultural contacts, their premises, outcomes and present significance.</p> <p>This task assesses students' ability to analyze the cultural, economic, and political factors that shaped early travel and cultural encounters between East Asia and Europe (ILO1) and produce a critical narrative to communicate ideas about Marco Polo's travels and cultural encounters (ILO3).</p>
Group Presentation	ILO1, ILO2	<p>Students are organized into smaller groups (5 to 7 people per group) to make presentations. Topics and content should be relevant to the class content and discussion. The team members should be clearly divided into their respective roles and each contributed to the presentation.</p> <p>The presentation and reflection assess students' ability to compare travel, travel writing and East-West encounters across different periods and civilizations (ILO2) and analyze different outcomes of travel and cultural encounters (ILO1)</p>
Course participation	ILO1, ILO2, ILO3	<p>Students are required to attend classes, participate in class discussions, ask questions and respond to classmates' presentations.</p> <p>Through individual and group activities students will analyze early travel and cultural encounters between East Asia and Europe (ILO1), discuss and evaluate Marco Polo's travels and cultural encounters (ILO2), communicate ideas about Polo's travels and cultural encounters (ILO3).</p>

Grading Rubrics

Detailed rubrics for each assignment will be provided. These rubrics clearly outline the criteria used for evaluation. Students can refer to these rubrics to understand how their work will be assessed.

Final Grade Descriptors:

Grades	Short Description	Elaboration on subject grading description
A	Excellent Performance	Demonstrates a comprehensive grasp of subject matter, expertise in problem-solving, and significant creativity in thinking. Exhibits a high capacity for scholarship and collaboration, going beyond core requirements to achieve learning goals.
B	Good Performance	Shows good knowledge and understanding of the main subject matter, competence in problem-solving, and the ability to analyze and evaluate issues. Displays high motivation to learn and the ability to work effectively with others.
C	Satisfactory Performance	Possesses adequate knowledge of core subject matter, competence in dealing with familiar problems, and some capacity for analysis and critical thinking. Shows persistence and effort to achieve broadly defined learning goals.
D	Marginal Pass	Has threshold knowledge of core subject matter, potential to achieve key professional skills, and the ability to make basic judgments. Benefits from the course and has the potential to develop in the discipline.
F	Fail	Demonstrates insufficient understanding of the subject matter and lacks the necessary problem-solving skills. Shows limited ability to think critically or analytically and exhibits minimal effort towards achieving learning goals. Does not meet the threshold requirements for professional practice or development in the discipline.

Course AI Policy

Students can use generative artificial intelligence tools to facilitate the research of materials and revise the PPTs and texts, but cannot use them to write assignments.

Communication and Feedback

Assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be communicated via Canvas within two weeks of submission. Feedback on assignments will include [specific details, e.g., strengths, areas for improvement]. Students who have further questions about the feedback including marks should consult the instructor within five working days after the feedback is received.

Required Texts and Materials

Details (title, author, publisher, publication year, web address etc.)	
1	Cattaneo, Angelo (curator), <i>Fra Mauro's world map</i> (extremely rich multilingual repository on Early Modern Exploration) https://mostre.museogalileo.it/framauro/en/
2	Gernet, Jacques, <i>Daily Life in China, on the Eve of the Mongol Invasion, 1250-1276</i> . Stanford University Press, 1962. ch. 1, The City (pp. 22-59)
3	Haw, S. G. <i>Marco Polo's China : a Venetian in the realm of Khubilai Khan</i> . Routledge, 2006
4	Jackson, Peter, 'Marco Polo and his "Travels"', <i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i> 61 (1998), pp. 82-101
5	Jackson, Peter, <i>The Mongols & the Islamic World : From Conquest to Conversion</i> . Yale University Press, 2017, Ch. 2 "The Islamic World and Inner Asian Peoples down to the Mongol Invasion" (pp. 46-70)
6	Jackson, Peter, 'Marco Polo and his "Travels"', <i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i> 61 (1998), pp. 82-101
7	Paine, Lincoln P. <i>The Sea and Civilization : A Maritime History of the World</i> . Vintage Books, 2015, ch. 12 (pp. 316-345)
8	Polo, Marco, <i>The Travels</i> , trans. Nigel Cliff, Penguin, London 2015
9	Rachewiltz, Igor de. <i>Prester John and Europe's discovery of East Asia</i> . Canberra : Australian National University Press 1972
10	Rossabi, Morris. <i>The Mongols: a very short introduction</i> . Oxford University Press, 2012
11	Rubiés J-P. Marco Polo's India and the Latin Christian tradition. In: <i>Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance: South India through European Eyes, 1250–1625</i> . Past and Present Publications. Cambridge University Press; 2000, ch.2 (pp. 35-84)
12	So, Billy K. L. <i>Prosperity, Region, and Institutions in Maritime China the South Fukien Pattern, 946-1368</i> . Harvard University Asia Center, 2001, ch. 7 (pp. 161-185)

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to adhere to the university's academic integrity policy. Students are expected to uphold HKUST's Academic Honor Code and to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. The University has zero tolerance of academic misconduct. Please refer to [Academic Integrity | HKUST – Academic Registry](#) for the University's definition of plagiarism and ways to avoid cheating and plagiarism.