

**Division of Humanities**  
**Tentative Course Syllabus**

**Course Code:** HUMA 1674  
**Course Title:** China in Historical Maps  
**Course Offered in:** Spring 2026  
**Course Instructor:** Dr. Marco Caboara

**Course Description:**

Using historical maps of China drawn by both Chinese and Western mapmakers from 1200 to 1800, the course will show students how maps can serve as windows into the past and introduce us to the worldviews of the mapmakers and their society. Through looking at the history, art and science of map making, the course will guide students to reflect on and find answers to these questions: how to look at ancient maps? How to identify and interpret place names, objects, peoples and animals depicted in the maps, and how to distinguish the real from the imaginary? Who made these maps, for whom, and for what purposes? How were the images of China produced by Chinese different from those by European cartographers?

**Course Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs):**

	<b>Course ILOs</b>
<b>1</b>	Describe and analyze the main kinds of maps from the perspectives of history, art, and science, including historical context, textual and visual features
<b>2</b>	Collaborate in groups on the analysis, discussion and evaluation of map form and content; and present the findings and arguments
<b>3</b>	Produce a critical narrative to communicate ideas about past and present geographical knowledge and data visualization

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**Course Outline:**

<b>Week</b>	
<b>1</b>	<p>Outline the main features of historic maps</p> <p>Reading assignments:          Surekha Davies, "Maps" in <i>Information: A Historical Companion</i>, ed. Ann Blair, Paul Duguid, Anja-Silvia Goeing and Anthony Grafton (Princeton, 2021), 594-600.</p> <p>Website: <i>Symbologies, The Art and Design of Expression in Historic Maps</i>  <a href="https://exhibits.stanford.edu/cartosym/browse">(<a href="https://exhibits.stanford.edu/cartosym/browse">https://exhibits.stanford.edu/cartosym/browse</a>)</a></p>
<b>2</b>	<p>Examine the relationship between travel, exploration and historic maps</p> <p>Reading assignment:          Nebenzahl, Kenneth, <i>Mapping the Silk Road and Beyond: 2,000 Years of Exploring the East</i>. (London: Phaidon, 2004), part 2</p>
<b>3</b>	<p>Introduce the main features of the Chinese mapping tradition until 1600</p> <p>Reading assignment:          Nie, Hongping Annie, and John Selden, <i>The Selden Map of China : a New Understanding of the Ming Dynasty</i>. (Oxford: The Bodleian Library, 2019)</p>
<b>4</b>	<p>Introduce the main types of Western maps of China in the 17th and 18th century and examine the main results of Western and Chinese cartographic collaboration</p> <p>Reading assignments:          Caboara, M., "1. Making and Structure of this Cartobibliography" in <i>Regnum Chiae</i> (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2022), pp. 15-37</p> <p>Cams, M., "8. Taking China's Measure: Eighteenth-Century Empire and the Mapping of Eurasia" in <i>Regnum Chiae</i>. (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2022), pp. 137-147</p>

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<b>5</b>	Text and image in maps- Iconclass analysis of map elements	<p>Introduce the main textual and visual features of historic maps and one online tool to study map images</p> <p>Reading assignment:  Reinhartz, Dennis. <i>The Art of the Map: an Illustrated History of Map Elements and Embellishments</i>. (New York: Sterling, 2012), introduction and chapter 1</p> <p>Exercise using Iconclass</p>
<b>6</b>	Discussion: How text and images are used in historical maps	Students will make presentations and have group discussions
<b>7</b>	Real and imaginary contexts in maps	<p>Examine peculiar and fictional elements in historical maps and compare them with maps fictional and imaginary places</p> <p>Reading assignments:  Van Duzer, Chet A. <i>Sea Monsters on Medieval and Renaissance Maps</i>. (London: The British Library, 2013), selected maps</p> <p>Manguel, Alberto., and Gianni. Guadalupi, <i>The Dictionary of Imaginary Places. Newly updated and expanded</i>. (New York: Harcourt Brace, 2000) selected entries</p>
<b>8</b>	Interactions in exhibition	Field Trip to the map exhibition in the Library, students are encouraged to apply what they learned and question the interpretations provided by the captions, Augmented Reality devices and gallery tour

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<b>9</b>	Cartography and perspective	Examine the Greek classical roots of linear perspective and map projections as seen in 16th and 17th century maps  Reading assignment: <i>Samuel Y. Edgerton, Jr., Florentine Interest in Ptolemaic Cartography as Background for Renaissance Painting, Architecture, and the Discovery of America.</i> <i>(Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Vol. 33, No. 4, December 1974) pp. 275-292</i>
<b>10</b>	Survey maps	Examine the beginnings of modern scientific surveying and mapping  Reading assignments: <i>Edney, Matthew H., "Geodetic Surveying in the Enlightenment." In <i>Cartography in the European Enlightenment</i>, vol. 4 of <i>History and Cartography</i>, ed. Matthew H. Edney, and Mary S. Pedley.</i> <i>(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), pp 439-50</i>  <i>Eric H. Ash, "Navigation techniques and practice in the Renaissance", in <i>History of Cartography</i>, vol. 3, <i>Cartography in the European</i>, ed. David Woodward.</i> <i>(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) pp. 509-527</i>
<b>11</b>	Contemporary maps Google maps/covid maps	Examine the main features of contemporary maps as data visualization tools and their relationship with historic maps  Reading assignments: <i>Brotton, Jerry, <i>A History of the World in Twelve Maps</i>.</i> <i>(New York: Viking, 2013), ch.12</i>  <i>Alexander J. Kent, <i>Mapping and Counter-Mapping COVID-19: From Crisis to Cartocracy</i></i> <i>(The Cartographic Journal, 2020) 57:3, 187-195</i>
<b>12</b>	Presentations and Wrap Up	Final Presentations
<b>13</b>	Presentations and Wrap Up	Final Presentations

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**Planned Assessment Tasks:**

Midterm:

Writing Assignment: Students are required to write an individual essay (1500-2000 words) that addresses the issues and debates related to the interpretation of historical maps, their creation and usage. Students can make an appointment with the lecturer to discuss the chosen topic (not mandatory).	35%
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Final:

Presentation: Students make presentations in groups (5-7 students) on topics of their choice. They are encouraged to present their ideas and arguments about a particular map or cartographic and geographic to the class. Each group will present 15 minutes.	35%
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Participation in class and worksheets:

Course Participation: Students are required to attend classes, participate in class discussions, ask questions and respond to classmates' presentations.	30%
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**Readings:**

1	Brotton, Jerry, <i>A History of the World in Twelve Maps</i> . (New York: Viking, 2013), ch.12
2	Surekha Davies, "Maps" in <i>Information: A Historical Companion</i> , ed. Ann Blair, Paul Duguid, Anja-Silvia Goeing and Anthony Grafton (Princeton, 2021), 594-600.
3	Symbologies, The Art and Design of Expression in Historic Maps ( <a href="https://exhibits.stanford.edu/cartosym/browse">https://exhibits.stanford.edu/cartosym/browse</a> )

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4	Nebenzahl, Kenneth, <i>Mapping the Silk Road and Beyond : 2,000 Years of Exploring the East</i> . (London: Phaidon, 2004), part 2
5	Nie, Hongping Annie, and John Selden, <i>The Selden Map of China : a New Understanding of the Ming Dynasty</i> . (Oxford: The Bodleian Library, 2019)
6	Caboara, M., "1. Making and Structure of this Cartobibliography" in <i>Regnum Chanae</i> (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2022), pp. 15-37
7	Cams, M., "8. Taking China's Measure: Eighteenth-Century Empire and the Mapping of Eurasia" in <i>Regnum Chanae</i> . (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2022), pp. 137–147
8	Reinhartz, Dennis. <i>The Art of the Map : an Illustrated History of Map Elements and Embellishments</i> . (New York: Sterling, 2012), introduction and chapter 1
9	Van Duzer, Chet A. <i>Sea Monsters on Medieval and Renaissance Maps</i> . (London: The British Library, 2013), selected maps
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12	Eric H. Ash, "Navigation techniques and practice in the Renaissance", in <i>History of Cartography, vol. 3, Cartography in the European</i> , ed. David Woodward. (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2007) pp. 509-527
13	Edney, Matthew H.. "Geodetic Surveying in the Enlightenment." In <i>Cartography in the European Enlightenment</i> , vol. 4 of <i>History and Cartography</i> , ed. Matthew H. Edney, and Mary S. Pedley. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), pp 439–50

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14	Alexander J. Kent, Mapping and Counter-Mapping COVID-19: From Crisis to Cartocracy (The Cartographic Journal, 2020) 57:3, 187-195
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