

Did European and Chinese Cartographies Ever Really Meet? Towards a More Global History of Mapping

Mario Cams
University of Macau

When historians study the circulation of cartographic practices between Western Europe and East Asia in early modern times, they typically subscribe to a framework in which “European science” is placed in opposition to a “Chinese tradition,” forming a fundamental dichotomy that shapes their inquiries. A good example is the set of Qing-era multi-sheet maps known in Chinese as the *Huangyu quanlan tu* 皇輿全覽圖. Nearly all scholarship dealing with these large eighteenth-century maps is concerned with the question of whether they constitute Chinese or European products, or, alternatively, which characteristics of the maps and of the large mapping project behind them, be they mensurational, observational, or representational, can be defined as either Chinese or European. Even when the idea of shared authorship is promoted, arguments center on a perceived balance between two cultural blocks in terms of their “contribution” to the mapping project and resulting maps. In contrast, on the basis of closely tracing the circulation of surveying instruments and maps across Eurasia, I argue that the search for European versus Chinese elements is redundant. A more global approach illustrates how the atlases were the product of a converging of interests between institutions, which in turn bolstered a wider circulation and adaptation of surveying practices and modes of representations. This process was guided and negotiated by individual actors who were unbound by the cultural dichotomy that modern historians have taken for granted.