

1. Record Nr.	UNINA9910452661603321
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Titolo	Mapping the Chinese and Islamic worlds : cross-cultural exchange in pre-modern Asia / / Hyunhee Park [[electronic resource]]
Pubbl/distr/stampa	Cambridge : , : Cambridge University Press, , 2012
ISBN	1-139-54005-X 1-139-88756-4 1-139-52846-7 1-139-53074-7 1-139-08832-7 1-139-52607-3 1-139-53193-X 1-283-63821-5 1-139-52727-4
Descrizione fisica	1 online resource (xxviii, 276 pages) : digital, PDF file(s)
Disciplina	303.48/251017670902
Soggetti	Discoveries in geography - History - To 1500 Cartography - History - To 1500 China Civilization 960-1644 Islamic Empire Civilization China Relations Islamic Empire Islamic Empire Relations China
Lingua di pubblicazione	Inglese
Formato	Materiale a stampa
Livello bibliografico	Monografia
Note generali	Title from publisher's bibliographic system (viewed on 05 Oct 2015).
Nota di bibliografia	Includes bibliographical references and index.
Nota di contenuto	Introduction -- From imperial encounter to maritime trade : Chinese understanding of the Islamic world, 750-1260 -- The representation of China and the world : Islamic knowledge about China, 750-1260 -- Interpreting the Mongol world : Chinese understanding of the Islamic world, 1260-1368 -- Beyond Marco Polo : Islamic knowledge about China, 1260-1368 -- Legacy from half the globe before 1492 : Chinese understanding of the Islamic world and Islamic knowledge about China, 1368-1500 -- Conclusion : lessons from premodern Sino-Islamic contact.

Long before Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope en route to India, the peoples of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia engaged in vigorous cross-cultural exchanges across the Indian Ocean. This book focuses on the years 700 to 1500, a period when powerful dynasties governed both regions, to document the relationship between the Islamic and Chinese worlds before the arrival of the Europeans. Through a close analysis of the maps, geographic accounts, and travelogues compiled by both Chinese and Islamic writers, the book traces the development of major contacts between people in China and the Islamic world and explores their interactions on matters as varied as diplomacy, commerce, mutual understanding, world geography, navigation, shipbuilding, and scientific exploration. When the Mongols ruled both China and Iran in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, their geographic understanding of each other's society increased markedly. This rich, engaging, and pioneering study offers glimpses into the worlds of Asian geographers and mapmakers, whose accumulated wisdom underpinned the celebrated voyages of European explorers like Vasco da Gama.

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