

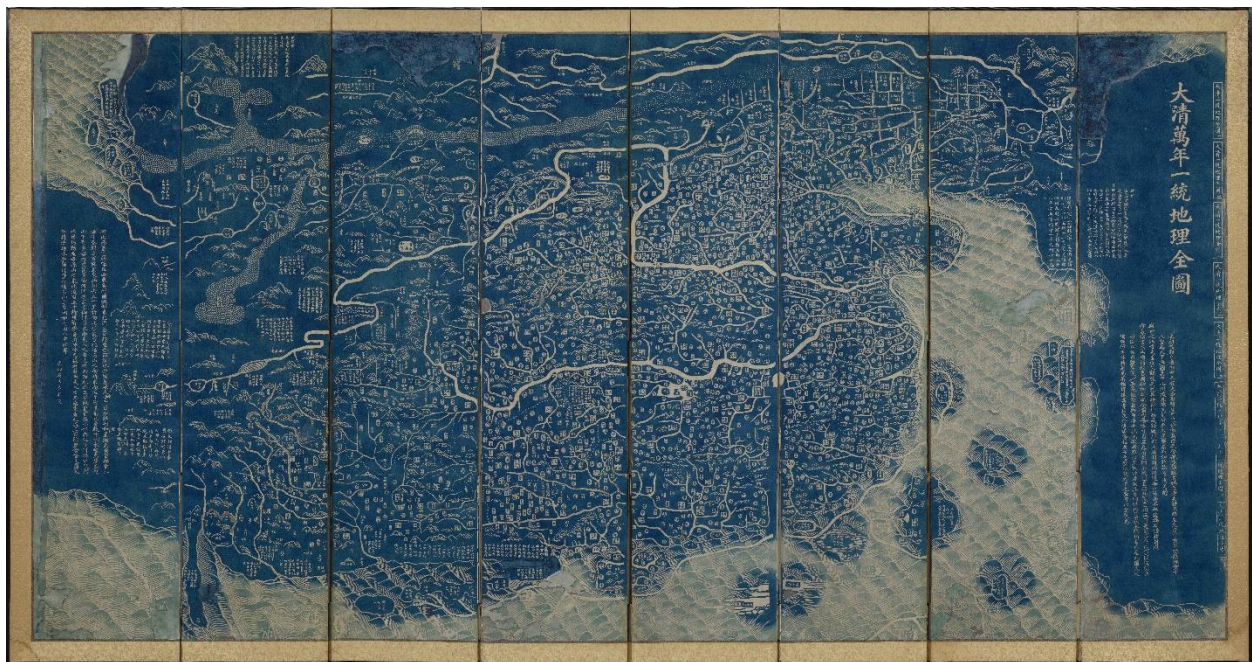


Norman B. Leventhal
Map & Education Center
at the Boston Public Library

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Library Exhibition of Chinese Maps Takes a Close Look at Cosmography and Color

New exhibition “Heaven & Earth: The Blue Maps of China” opens at Leventhal Map & Education Center at the Boston Public Library on May 11, 2024



大清萬年一統地理全圖 [*Daqing wannian yitong dili quantu*; *Complete Geographical Map of the Everlasting Unified Qing Empire*] (ca. 1818). MacLean Collection.

BOSTON, MA – April 16, 2024 - *Heaven & Earth: The Blue Maps of China*, a free public exhibition at the Leventhal Map & Education Center (LMEC) at the Boston Public Library (BPL) will open this spring on May 11, 2024.

The exhibition revolves around two extraordinary large-format maps printed in China in the early nineteenth century—one portraying the terrestrial world of the Qing empire and the other portraying a star chart of the heavens. Never before exhibited together, these maps tell a remarkable story of artistic production and political history. They are also some of the

very earliest printed materials from East Asia to use the pigment Prussian blue, predating more famous uses of this colorant, such as Hokusai's *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*, by several decades.

Heaven & Earth: The Blue Maps of China is guest curated by Dr. Richard Pegg, Director and Curator of the MacLean Collection in Illinois. The exhibition pairs the MacLean Collection's copy of the blue terrestrial map with maps from the Leventhal Center, Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard Map Collection, and Adler Planetarium.

"My first encounter with these maps I think would be similar to anyone's: *Wow!* These are impressive and beautiful objects. Trained as an art historian, I wanted to understand what I was looking at and how they were made," says Dr. Pegg. "Visually, when placed side by side, these two maps remind the viewer of the relationship between humankind, heaven, and earth. These are depictions of heaven and earth through the lens of human perception with the intention of human interpretation and use."

One of the goals of this exhibition is to encourage visitors to consider the juxtaposition of East Asian concepts of geography and cosmography with those of Europeans at the same time. Visitors will learn how these maps were used as tools of political administration for Qing rulers, while also serving as unique objects of artistic production.

"The maps in *Heaven & Earth* draw you in on multiple levels," says Garrett Dash Nelson, President & Head Curator at the Leventhal Center. "They are striking and engrossing visual objects, rendered on a colossal scale. At the same time, they are invitations to contemplate how people in a very different historic and geographic context understood the world around them."

Heaven & Earth also features the work of teen curators from Boston Public Schools who worked with the Center's K-12 education team. Students learned about the maps in the exhibition and responded to the "blue maps" with artwork of their own, reflecting on the artists' ideas about how individuals fit into a larger cosmology.

Public Access and Programming

As with all programming at the Boston Public Library, admission to *Heaven & Earth* is free to all. Visitors will find information about gallery hours and events, as well as a companion online exhibition, at leventhalmap.org. Guided tours of the gallery are available for free during gallery hours, and K-12, university, and group visits are available by appointment.

Exhibition programs for adults will be available throughout the course of the exhibition, both online and in person. An updated calendar of events and programs associated with *Heaven & Earth* can be found at leventhalmap.org/event. *Heaven & Earth* closes on August 31, 2024.

Events and Engagement

Public events and outreach programs during the run of *Heaven & Earth* will include curatorial talks, interpretive content in a companion digital exhibition, and hands-on gallery activities. More details on exhibition-related activities will be announced later this spring at leventhalmap.org/event.

Hours and Exhibition Details

Heaven & Earth: The Blue Maps of China will be open **Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays from 11 am–5 pm, Wednesdays from 1-7 pm, and Sundays from 1–5 pm. Admission is free.** Guided tours are available by advance request.

- More information on the exhibition, including directions, access, and visitor requirements can be found at leventhalmap.org/exhibitions.
- An updated calendar of events and programs associated with *Heaven & Earth* can be found at leventhalmap.org/event.
- The companion digital exhibition for *Heaven & Earth* can be found at leventhalmap.org/digital-exhibitions/heaven-and-earth/.

Media Contact

To arrange interviews about *Heaven & Earth*, curator-guided visits to the Leventhal Map & Education Center, or for digital images of exhibition objects, contact the Leventhal Center's Communications and Gallery Coordinator [Julia Williams](mailto:jwilliams@leventhalmap.org), jwilliams@leventhalmap.org / 617-859-2383.

About the Leventhal Map & Education Center

The Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center at the Boston Public Library is an independent nonprofit organization that promotes the public use of more than a quarter million geographic objects for the enjoyment and education of all. Uniquely positioned in a public library, the Leventhal Center offers exhibitions and public talks, groundbreaking

educational programs that promote geographic and data literacy, and extensive digital resources.

The Leventhal Center is known for the size and significance of its collection, as well as its engagement with K-12 audiences. With a global scope and a regional specialization in Boston and New England, the Center is a leader in exploring the study of places, societies, landscapes, and history through the lens of maps and geography.

About the Boston Public Library

Established in 1848, the Boston Public Library is a pioneer of public library service in America. It was the first large, free municipal library in the United States; the first public library to lend books; the first to have a branch library; and the first to have a children's room.

The Boston Public Library of today is a robust system that includes the Central Library in Copley Square, 25 neighborhood branches, the Norman B. Leventhal Map and Education Center, the Kirstein Business Library and Innovation Center, and an archival center, offering public access to world-class special collections of rare books, manuscripts, photographs, and prints, along with rich digital content and online services.

The Boston Public Library serves nearly 4 million visitors per year and millions more online. All its programs and exhibitions are free to all and open to the public. The Boston Public Library is a department of the City of Boston, under the leadership of Mayor Michelle Wu. To learn more, visit [bpl.org](https://www.bpl.org).