

Publicly Displayed Maps in Chikusa-ku, Nagoya: Samples of Japanese Cartographic Art

Simon Potter

Throughout Japan, and especially in its large cities, there are innumerable maps on display to the public. Considerable work has been involved, as great care has been taken not only to create but also to display the maps since peculiarities can be found to demonstrate that they were composed to be put up in a certain spot. Although many maps appear to have been made primarily for people to find their way, others clearly serve at least partly as advertisements for places and events, something that is usually given away by pictorial content which is not necessary just for locating places. Nagoya has a plenitude of such maps, and approximately one hundred were photographed throughout the city by the author early in 2007. These and others in the city will be treated in a lengthier publication to address their artistic side, but for the time being a brief analysis using sample maps found in Chikusa Ward is provided here.

From a cartographic perspective, the nine maps reproduced in this essay have the common denominator of providing topographical information, which can be transformed into useful spatial knowledge by whoever consults them. Other than that, though, they vary in terms not only of what they portray but also of style, especially where the artistic components are concerned. Color, for example, is important in all of them (even that shown in photographs 8 and 9, which at first sight appears to be a faded black-and-white composition), yet the usage of colors just in this small set suggests that choices were made on the basis of nature, convention, visual impact, or something else, that is eclecticism was at work when they were created. Similarly, the lining and labeling vary considerably within the set, as does the attention to detail which balances selected information with esthetic effect. Perhaps most interesting, however, are the various ways that the pictorial constituents – the key elements, landmarks, and such like – have been portrayed.

These constituents have been subjected to degrees of abstraction, and four types may be found on the maps reproduced here. As identified and defined elsewhere

(Potter 2003, 198-9), the types of illustration fall into two general categories, one being mainly informative by drawing attention to the location of the subject and the other tending to be more esthetic in the sense of drawing attention to the subject itself. On the predominantly informative side, “abstract symbols” are illustrations “which do not resemble what they denote, but which are understood because of cartographic convention,” while “symbolic resemblances” are those which “function as symbols, but differ from conventional ones in that they have not been reduced to complete abstraction and can easily be associated with what they represent.” On the predominantly esthetic side, “idealized portraits” are pictures “which capture the essence of a subject with a sufficient degree of artistic license to argue that the impression is not supposed to be an exact replica or a reasonably detailed copy,” while “realistic portraits” tend to “strongly capture the unique spirit of a subject by being photographs or rather detailed, lifelike drawings, including to the point that the surroundings of the subject might be similarly depicted.” Although the maps in this article do not have any samples, it is worth noting that a fifth category, cartoon characters, has also been identified.

Photograph 1 focuses on the residential area Midori-ga-Oka (Green Hill) just north of the Hoshi-ga-Oka (Star Hill) bus terminal. It is a “bare-bones” type of map in that it relies on two-dimensional geometry and words, with the roads being in a pale green. Although there is no legend or other form of explanation, the names written throughout the map seem to indicate land occupancy, and most of those in the smaller plots of land refer to residences. Similarly, photograph 2 is visually quite simple and relies considerably on verbal information to direct viewers to places where bicycles ought to be parked. It is, however, a bit more complex artistically than the first photograph in that it is color coded – pink for the subway station, yellow for tracts of land between roads, red for the places to park bicycles, blue rectangles containing the names of the parking places – and has two abstract symbols just right of the center. The abstract symbols are not explained in the legend or elsewhere on the map, but through conventional knowledge they would be recognized as a local police office (*kôban*) and a post office (a circled \times and $\bar{\times}$ respectively).

The third map (photograph 3) locates bus stops around the Chaya-ga-Saka (Tea-Shop Slope) subway station and contains abstract symbols and symbolic resemblances. In regard to the former, that for the post offices ($\bar{\times}$) is conventional, those for the elevator at exit 2 of the subway station and the four bus stops along the road at the left of the map are understood through the legend, and those for a hospital

(upper left) and two banks (lower left, lower right quadrant) are understood from verbal context. Of the two types of symbolic resemblance, the four pictures of a bus are explained in the legend, while the train on tracks at the left end of the subway station is explained verbally. Otherwise, the map uses a few colors to highlight land between the roads, including green for parkland, and the location of the subway station and line below the ground.

Photograph 4 is a map to direct viewers to the nearby subway stations from the central part of the Higashiyama (Eastern Hills) Park complex which has a botanical and zoological garden. The encircled P is purely abstract and explained at the bottom right, while the vertical and horizontal traffic lights are symbolic resemblances that are easily understood. In the center of the map, and shown more clearly in photograph 5, is a two-dimensional idealized portrait of the Higashiyama Sky Tower. The picture captures the tower's salient features – a rectangular column with a triangular top – when viewed without access to depth, but it does not capture peculiarities of construction or reveal how many sides the tower has. Such detail, however, is not necessary since the tower is a landmark which can be seen for miles (see the upper left of photograph 12) and cannot be mistaken for anything else.

The next two maps (photographs 6-9) also include samples of idealized portraits and can even be seen as idealized compositions as a whole. That shown in photographs 6 and 7 depicts the modestly sized Shintô shrine Shiroyama Hachimangû which is located on a hill that used to house Suemori Castle. In a few places are references to remains of the castle that was built in 1548 and abandoned in 1559 – in the center its Honmaru (Main Enclosure), in the lower left quadrant its Ni-no-Marû (Second Enclosure), and a lot of the greenery its moat – but the bulk of the content relates to the shrine which exists today. Besides the buildings and other structures being located, some ideas have been given about what they look like without being too precise. The four large white torii in the lower half of the map and the buildings in the main part of the compound in the upper half, for example, provide some insights into architectural style, while the pictures of walls and stairs contribute to a generally proportional sense of elevation. In the close-up of the lower left quadrant (photograph 7) can be seen two torii, a bridge, and Shôwa Jukudô (Shôwa Private School Building), which was an academy that started in 1928 (Shôwa 3) and is now a part of Aichi Gakuin University.

Highlighting areas northwest and southeast of Shiroyama Hachimangû, photograph 8 belongs to a genre of “sightseeing route” maps in Nagoya. It is a rather

detailed, although idealized study of the selected areas and has a yellow dashed line to indicate a route that might interest tourists, yet the map is a bit confused when it comes to addressing them. Whereas the title, sights of interest, landmarks, and transportation points are in English, and the road names in romanized Japanese, a verbal description (upper right) and the name (lower left) of the route are given only in Japanese. That aside, this oblique view captures essential shapes of buildings and other structures such as the pond on the grounds of Nagoya University, while a leafy image is cultivated by the numerous roundish shapes above their shadows which pass off as trees. These sorts of things are more clearly visible in photograph 9, a close-up of the lower right corner which also includes two automobiles on the road between the university and Motoyama Station.

Photograph 10 was taken inside the Nagoya Daigaku (University) subway station, shows the university and surrounding area, and advertises businesses and the two universities which are served by the station. In terms of symbolism, color is clearly important – the three main ones are orange for buildings, green for parkland, and blue for ponds – but there are also small abstract symbols dispersed throughout the map and explained in the legend below the advertisements on the right-hand side of the photograph. The advertisements themselves, although attached to the sides of the map per se, contain samples of realistic portraits as well as two drawings. In this case the realistic portraits are photographs, nearly all of which are directly related to the place being advertised (Nanzan University, for some reason, has a picture of the Television Tower and Oasis 21 in Sakae several kilometers away to the westnorthwest). Photograph 11 shows the two advertisements for Nagoya University off to the left at the bottom of the map, including a view from the library of Toyota Auditorium which is not visible in photograph 10.

The map shown in the next two photographs has been included to make a couple of observations that go beyond cartographic esthetics. One, as suggested in photograph 12 which includes two maps in the foreground, is that maps on public display in Japan are generally sited in places where they can be consulted by pedestrians or bicyclists and that they typically do not harm the visual impact of the landscape. Their location also tends to serve practical purposes, notably helping people who are not familiar with an area or trying to address a problem. The map closer to the bicycles in photograph 12 belongs to a city-wide genre of maps with information about nearby approved places to park bicycles (akin to the map in photograph 2) and about where to pick up bicycles which have been taken away and impounded.

Photograph 13 has the other map, which shows a rather broad area around Motoyama subway station and uses colors, lines, and abstract symbols in conventional ways. The interesting thing here, though, is that another artist decided that the composition was not sufficiently complete, painted in an esoteric message and autograph, as well as spilled some ink on the map itself.

Finally, photograph 14 includes a simple map to accompany an informative brief on the wombats at the Higashiyama Zoo. The multilingual title (Japanese twice, Latin, English, Chinese, Korean, Portuguese) is followed by explanations in Japanese and English which are both well written and match each other, while the map has only a Japanese caption. Although there is no legend, the caption suggests that the wombat lives in the southeastern part of mainland Australia and on Tasmania, both of which are colored red on an otherwise blank outline map of the country.

Overall, these sample maps demonstrate that even within one ward a diverse set in terms of style and content may be found. In terms of content, the maps are informative in that their themes include land occupancy, where to park bicycles for a fee, where to catch buses or how to get to subway stations, buildings and routes of interest to a tourist, and the habitat of an exotic animal, whereas one is clearly linked to commercial advertising and all provide topographical information which might be used for purposes other than those covered by the theme. Regarding style, a few comments have been made near the beginning of this article, as well as in the discussion of each map, but two more points are worth mentioning.

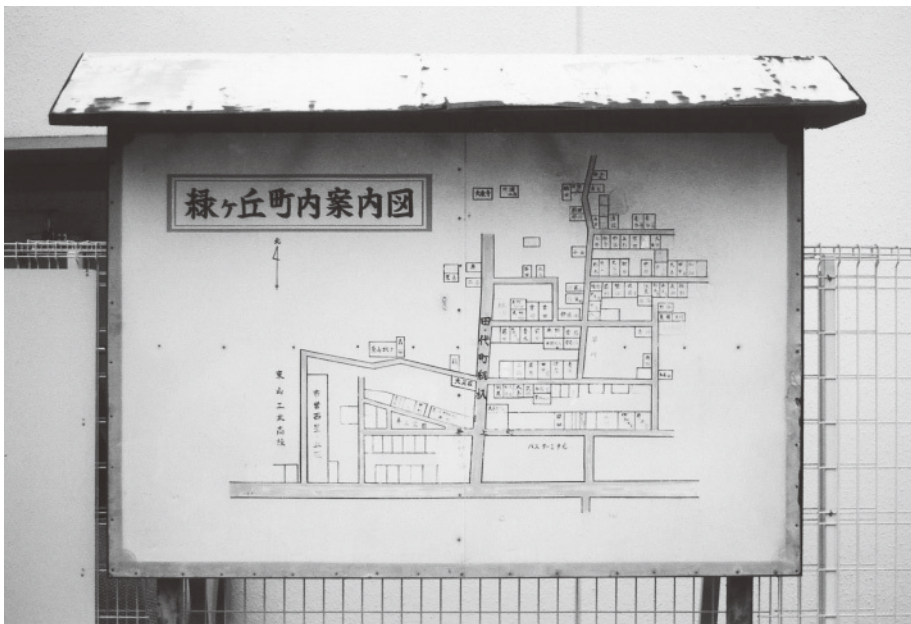
One is that both two-dimensional and three-dimensional images can be found in the samples here. The maps in photographs 1, 2, 3, 4, 10, 12, and 14 are two-dimensional both as a composition and in regard to their components, while the maps in photographs 6 and 8 are oblique views which provide a feel for depth, the third dimension, as do the photographs in the advertisements on either side of the map in photograph 10. Known as “planar,” the two-dimensional maps are generally “businesslike” by emphasizing locations or spatial relationships, and in the set provided here even the symbolic resemblances and the idealized portrait of the Higashiyama Sky Tower, all “flat,” are not particularly inspiring. The oblique perspectives, known in Japanese as *chôkanzu* (bird’s-view-diagram, although the birds must be specially adapted to very high flying), might be considered to be visually more attractive and perhaps easier to understand because their content can be rather quickly associated with elements in the surrounding landscape.

The second point deals with orientation. All of the maps except that of Australia

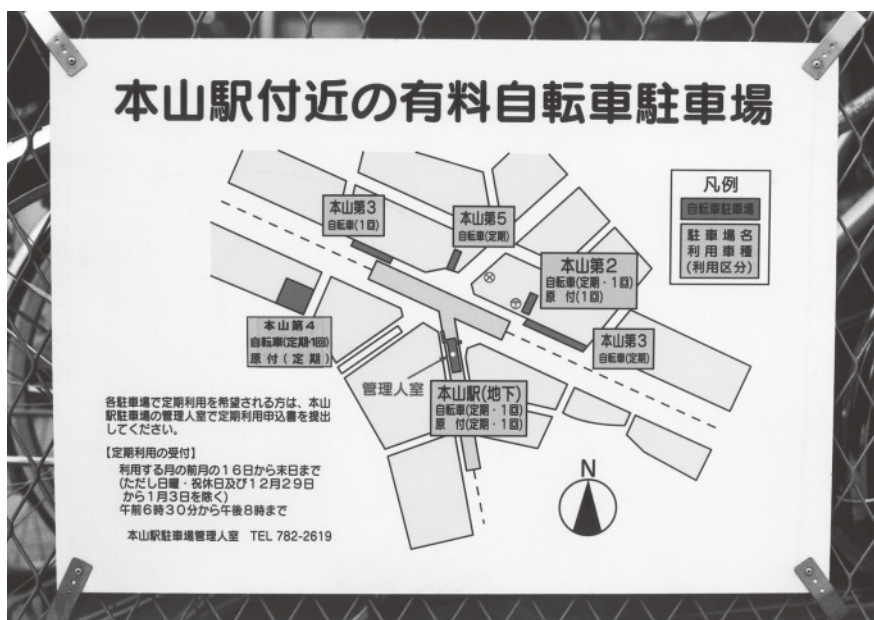
designate north, which lies to the top of six maps and to the right, left, and bottom of one each. The maps in photographs 2, 3, 10, and 13 share the same symbol, a circle with a triangle inside and the letter “N” at the tip of its smallest angle, while those in photographs 1, 4, and 6 are similar in that they rely on a triangle that resembles the number 4 and designate north through 北 (*kita*, north, in 1) or “N” (4, 6). Photograph 8, however, has a rather elaborate, yellow compass rose with sixteen points and the letter “N” above that denoting north. This probably has something to do with the composition as a whole being rather artistically involved and aimed in part at foreigners, the compass rose being a European device which evolved from medieval marine charts and perhaps thereby associated with “Western” culture. The reason that north is not consistently placed in one part of all the maps is that they were compiled to be viewed at a particular site and, generally, to be painlessly associated with the surrounding landscape (e.g. what the viewer sees on the right side of many such maps is actually to the viewer’s right). Although the map in photograph 6 was erected in a place where what is on the map’s right is not on the viewer’s right, topographic context makes the map readily understandable. In the case of photograph 8, however, a mistake was clearly made when it was put up facing the road (hence south) rather than on the opposite side of the sidewalk (hence north); this, of course, is something not revealed in the map itself, but was discovered on site.

Reference

Potter, Simon R. "Illustrated Maps on Public Display in Japan: Geography and Artistic Tradition." *Geographical Review of Japan* 76, 12 (2003): 187-206 or 823-42. This article has several references, which are germane to this study and also refer to other secondary sources that treat Japanese cartography.



1: *Midori-ga-Oka Chônai Annaizu* (Information Map of the Midori-ga-Oka Neighborhood); north to the top, February 2007



2: *Motoyama-Eki Fukin no Yûryô Jitensha Chûshajo* (Fee-Charging Bicycle Parking Spaces in the Vicinity of Motoyama Station); north to the top, February 2007



3: *Shi-Basu Noriba Annai / City Bus Information* (J.: Information about the Platforms for City Buses) near Chaya-ga-Saka Station; north to the left, January 2007



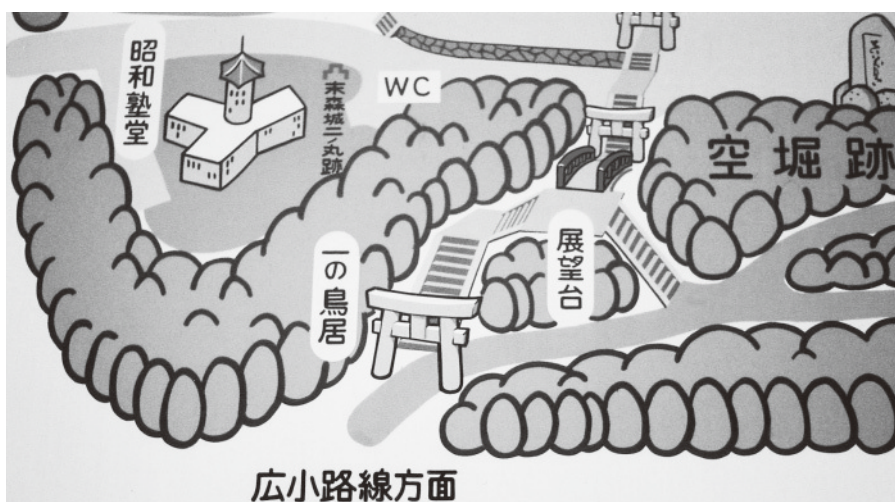
4: Chikatetsu Hoshi-ga-Oka-Eki Higashiyama-Kôen-Eki made no Annaizu (Information Map of [the Routes] to the Hoshi-ga-Oka Station [and] Higashiyama-Kôen Station [of the] Subway [System]); north to the top, February 2007



5: Close-up from the center of Photograph 4



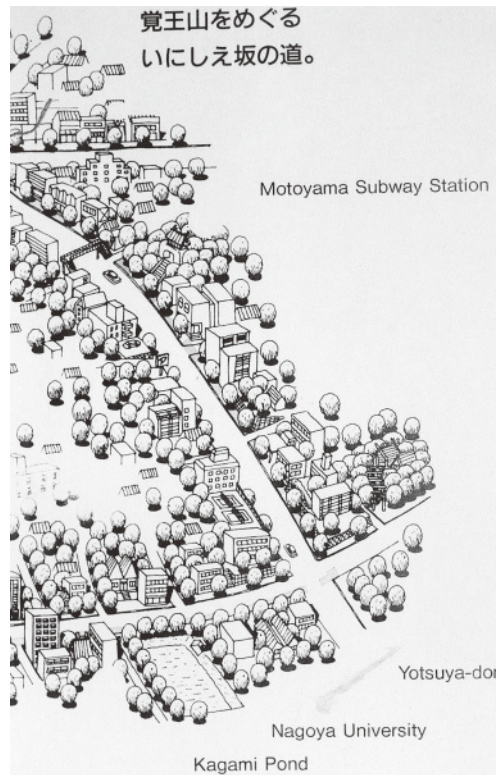
6: Shiroyama-Hachimangû Keidai Annaizu (Information Map of the Grounds of Shiroyama Hachimangû); north to the top, February 2007



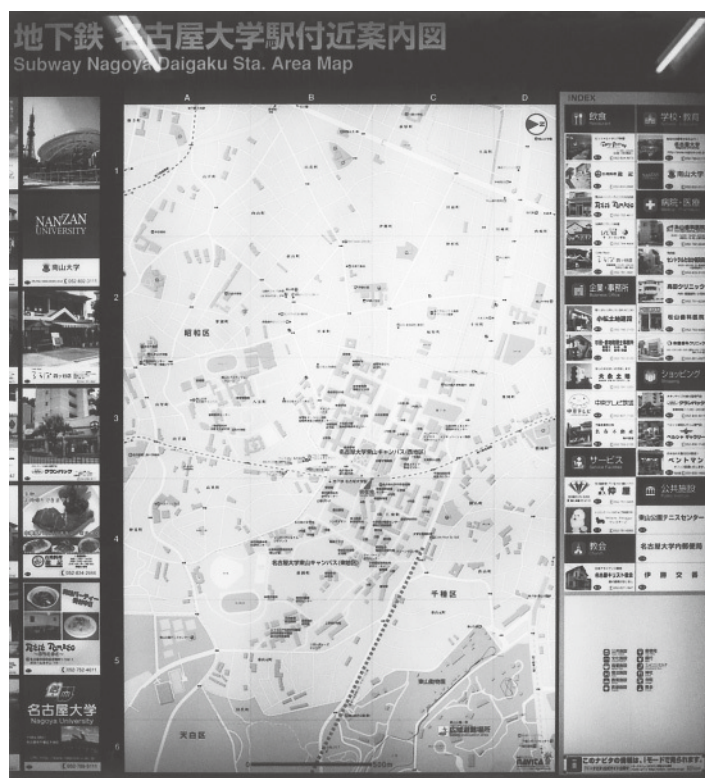
7: Close-up from the lower left of Photograph 6



8: *Sightseeing Route*; north to the top, February 2007



9: Close-up from the lower right of Photograph 8



10: *Chikatetsu Nagoya-Daigaku-Eki Fukin Annaizu / Subway Nagoya Daigaku Sta. Area Map*
(J.: Information Map of the Vicinity of Nagoya Daigaku Station [of the] Subway [System]);
north to the right, February 2007



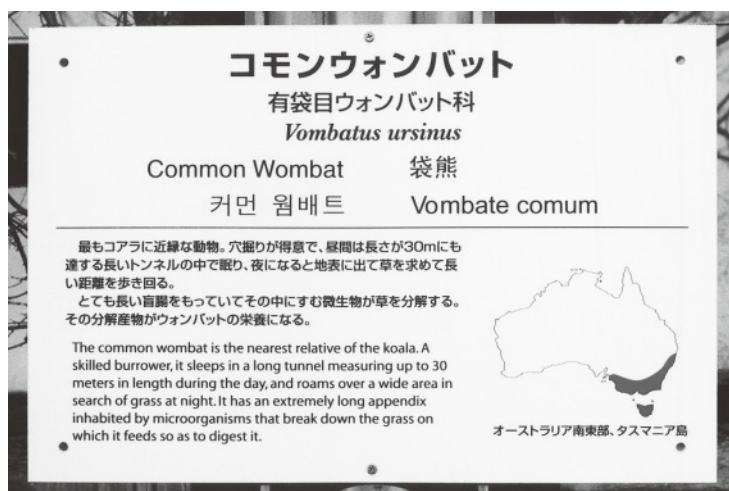
11: Close-up from the lower left of Photograph 10 and its extension



12: View eastward along Higashiyama Dôri (Eastern Hills Avenue) near Motoyama Station, with two information boards with maps in the foreground; February 2007



13: *Chiiki Annaizu / Area Map* (J.: Information Map of the Area) of Motoyama, shown in the foreground of Photograph 12; the title is partly obscured by graffiti, but was deduced from the same being on similar maps throughout the city; north to the bottom, February 2007



14: Map of Australia in the Higashiyama Zoo; north to the top, February 2007