

On the Artistic Heritage of Japanese Cartography: Historical Perceptions of Maps and Space

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Japan has a long history of cartography that, although rather well explored by Japanese scholars, has to a great extent been ignored by scholars from other countries. This lengthy heritage can be traced as far back as the eighth century A.D. with a few hints of earlier activity, is rooted in various aspects of Japanese culture, and can provide valuable visual insights into Japanese perspectives on the landscape, their country, the world at large, and the entire cosmos.

Japanese maps have often been a cross between abstract, scientific or mathematical documents and landscape drawings or paintings, but there are some subtleties and historical works which argue that mapmaking in Japan has through the centuries been treated more as a visual art than a scientific enterprise, a theme that this essay develops. The first section delves into cartographic and related terminology to demonstrate that there was no true concept of “map” in the scientific sense until Japanese scholars and other personnel from the latter half of the eighteenth century translated or used mathematically based European maps, created similar Japanese works, and inspired Japanese projects in which mathematical accuracy and consistency became an important component of maps. Although this semantic tradition essentially describes an avant-garde process that culminated in the “modernization” of Meiji Japan (1868-1912), a longstanding generic word for maps (*ezu*) has continued to exist in the vocabulary, but now with a narrower meaning that captures the artistic spirit of Japanese map history and that of contemporary illustrated maps. This visual, artistic spirit is addressed in the second section which alludes to historical perceptions of terrestrial and celestial space by highlighting various types of map that have been produced in Japan. The last section has some concluding remarks about Japanese maps as a form of applied geography and even astronomy, their link to the popular culture, and their selective approach to the landscape, which lead to a final paragraph about the relevance of examining cartographic artwork for cultural

insights and to appreciate the often overlooked esthetic side of cartography.

Also, it is worth noting here that none of the maps referred to in this article are reproduced. There was a limitation on the number of pages for publication and the idea of selecting only a few examples for illustration did not seem appropriate, hence readers are directed throughout the article to publications with useful reproductions.

Etymology

Language is a key component of culture, and Japanese has evolved through indigenous (Yamato), East Asian (Chinese and Korean), and Western (European and North American) influences that have created an interesting set of symbols which are transmitted by sound or by written or drawn markings. In regard to the disciplines of geography and, especially, cartography, the Japanese language conveys ideas that are rather easily understood through written characters of Chinese origin, although some new words adapted from the English language in particular are correctly written only in the katakana syllabary which does not contain any ideographic leads. A comprehensive, detailed study on Japanese cartographic vocabulary comprising three articles (Potter 2000, 2001a, 2001c) provides details, examples, and analysis, from which a few points have been extracted here to establish a collective mindset through cartographic vocabulary.

As noted in *The History of Cartography* (Unno 1994), the key syllable for Japanese cartographic vocabulary is *zu* (圖, now 図), which is close in meaning to the English word “diagram” and may serve as a word in its own right or as a root in larger words. Related to the contemporary Chinese 图 (*tú* in Mandarin), the character 圖 and its predecessors may also be pronounced *to* and, less commonly, *haka* and *zū*, and an analysis of words with the character revealed that a “visual image” was directly conveyed or implied (Potter 2001a). For cartography, *zu* has been by far the most common pronunciation, but entries in the first official national history entitled *Nihon Shoki* (Written Account of Japan, 720 A.D.) suggest that it was pronounced *shirushi* and *kata* at the dawn of the known cartographic record in Japan (Unno 1994, 1996). Unlike *zu* and *to* which are Japanized variants of northern Chinese *tú*, *shirushi* and *kata* are indigenous pronunciations that respectively convey the meanings of “sign” (mark, symbol) and “shape,” and today neither is written as 圖 or a character derived from its predecessors (Potter 2000). The connection in meaning of the character

in the *Nihon Shoki* to 圖 and *zu*, but not to current characters for *shirushi* and *kata*, may be seen in a version of the *Nihon Shoki* in modern-day Japanese that combined linguistic revision with scholarly interpretation (Ujitani 1999).

An important point in understanding the philosophical context of maps in Japan, whether terrestrial or celestial, is that 圖 and *zu* alone were often used in the title or reference to a particular map or set of maps. Such sequences as *Dainihonkoku no zu* (map of the Country of Great Japan), *Nansenbushū no zu* (map of Jambudvīpa [a continent in Buddhist cosmology]), and *ten no zu* (map of the heavens) imply that cartographic works could simply be considered to be “diagrams” and the qualifying words indicated what a particular diagram was about. This line of reasoning may be extended to maps of specified places or routes (e.g. *Ōsaka no zu*, “diagram” of Ōsaka; *Tōkaidō no zu*, “diagram” of the East Sea Road) and, where *zu* serves as a root, to general types of map (*chizu*, land “diagram”; *kaizu*, sea “diagram”; *seizu*, “diagram” of stars) and narrow ones (e.g. *kaidenzu*, “diagram” of cleared fields; *toshizu*, city “diagram”; *dōchūzu*, route “diagram”; *sekaizu*, world “diagram”). A good source for Japanese cartographic vocabulary, including many words in which *zu* conveys the meaning of “map,” is Nihon Kokusai Chizugakkai (1998) with a relevant analysis in Potter (2001c).

Despite the rather satisfactory use of 圖 and *zu* on their own for cartographic works even up to the present, by the tenth century a sentiment that maps were a special type of diagram that warranted a word of its own seems to have arisen. According to Unno (1985, 1994) the three words *denzu* (field diagram), *hakuzu* (blank diagram), and *ezu* (picture diagram) existed while the gridded *jōri* system of land demarcation was in use in ancient Japan to designate types of maps. Whereas a *hakuzu* was essentially abstract in that it recorded the relevant part of a grid for land development and had verbal messages about the type of land or water, an *ezu* relied on drawings to capture the salient features of the landscape. Judging from extant maps from the eighth century and especially after the Heian Period (794-1192) when the known record is immense, it appears that maps with pictorial information and even embellishments were valued more than their dryer cousins well into the eighteenth century, if not later. It was during the Heian Period that Japanese culture in toto, and certainly among the elite, began a millennium-long process of crystallization which more or less rejected newer influences from overseas, and the tenth century in particular turned out to have been a period of literary incubation that influenced linguistic use and other arts all the way to the present. During this

period the indigenous neologism *ezu* became the generic word for maps and, through interpreting its characters 繪 (now 絵, *e*, picture) and 圖 (図), suggests that Japanese considered them to be “picture diagrams.”

The term *ezu* did not however describe the “picture diagrams,” unlike the English word “map” which was originally coined to refer to diagrams of land and of land and water. Despite the topographical spirit of the word “map” being implied from how *ezu* was used, it would seem that its characters left open the possibility for broader use, as has always been the case with *zu*. Perhaps for this reason, and certainly under the influence of a deepening appreciation of European mapmaking by eighteenth-century Japanese specialists in Dutch Studies, a semantic change gradually unfolded in favor of the neologism *chizu*. Comprising the characters for “land” (地, *chi*) and “diagram,” it caught on within the academic community, was given more prestige by Inō Tadataka who surveyed the coastlines and roads of the country from 1800 to 1815, gained more currency throughout the nineteenth century, and was eventually adopted by the Bureau of Land Surveying, the Ministry of Education, and the Army during the Meiji Period (Nihon Kokusai Chizugakkai 1998).

Whereas the term *chizu* has since been in popular as well as specialist use for “map,” it has had a harder time expanding its semantic scope than has “map,” which has moved in the direction of being a synonym for any diagram showing locations (e.g. a “map” of the human genome). This is because the character 地 restricts the term to “land,” making it technically incorrect to spread the use of *chizu* to maps or charts of the sea or heavens as a starter, and the idea of a “land diagram of the brain” is absurd or at best amusing. *Zu* however remains in use for the various categories of map, as noted previously, as well as for such latter examples of diagrams as an anatomical chart (*kaibōzu*), an electrocardiogram (*shindenzu*), and a pattern or design (*zugara*), while drawing or draftsmanship in general is *zuhō*. A recent tendency that seems to reflect cultural fashion but which might be seen as an unconscious attempt to address the semantic limitations of *chizu* is the intrusion into the Japanese language of the word *mappu*, an indigenous pronunciation of the English word “map” that is written properly in the katakana syllabary (マップ). As with other foreign loan words, *mappu* technically does not have any Chinese characters and can therefore be given a broad semantic scope akin to *zu*, although virtually all observed popular usages pertain to topographic diagrams while such specialist terms as *bācharumappu* (virtual map [as in one on a computer screen]), *dijitarumappu* (digital map), and *mentarumappu* (mental map) are recently coined

expressions imported directly from English.

There are two key points from the cultural angle to be extracted from this brief on Japanese vocabulary pertaining to maps. One is that the linguistic sequence for the generic words meaning “map” reveals a tension between indigenous and foreign forces or influences, while the other is that their coinage and usage provide insights into what Japanese considered locational documents and artifacts to be. The early usage of *shirushi* and *kata* insinuate that the Yamato people considered whatever topographical maps they had as drawn “signs” or “symbols” (*shirushi*) and “shapes” (*kata*), and it would not be unreasonable to assume that *kata* could have been used to describe the two celestial diagrams engraved on the ceilings of tombs dating to ca. 700 A.D. in Asuka, Nara prefecture (e.g. Miyajima 1994, 1998, 1999). Whether these words existed before *zu* is not clear, but the longstanding usage of *zu* indicates a satisfaction with both a pronunciation adapted from Chinese and a general sense of “diagram” to capture the essence of, as it turned out, terrestrial and celestial maps. Come the middle of the Heian Period, however, as some stylistic differences among maps became obvious and as literary and artistic Japan was consciously cultivating indigenous rather than Chinese genres, the term *ezu* was coined to express pictorial or illustrated diagrams. Usage of this expression coincided with the centuries of virtual isolation from the rest of the world, and it seems to have captured the spirit of Japanese maps for the most part. The post-Renaissance European maps that were rooted in advanced information acquired through geographical exploration and surveys, astronomy, and mathematics, and which Japanese became familiar with from the middle of the eighteenth century, provided a new perspective on maps and mapmaking that revolved around mathematical accuracy and symbolic abstraction, which eventually led Japanese to make maps which focused on “land” (*chi*) more than on “pictures” or artistic “illustrations” (*e*). This perspective has from a broad view been maintained up until the present through the term *chizu*, although a new foreign infusion is being felt through *mappu* which reflects both the impact of American culture on contemporary Japan and a preference for loan words over indigenous neologisms for new concepts.

Japanese Cartography Past as Art

The Japanese tradition of mapmaking might be characterized as one in which exaggerated images have been employed to convey spatial information. Notwith-

standing the cutting-edge tendency over the last two centuries to compile accurate, proportionately correct maps, there is still a myriad of published or otherwise produced maps in Japan that continue to provide information less in a meticulous, carefully measured way than in one that requires the user to feel secure with relativity and to have an appreciation for visual esthetics. *Ezu*, although no longer the generic word for maps but rather a synonym of *echizu* (絵地図) and *irasutomappu* (イラストマップ) which both mean “illustrated map,” remains in use to describe these pictorial or illustrated maps, while both the term and the style breathe contemporary life into an ingrained cultural heritage.

Historical roots for Japanese illustrated maps and maps used as illustrations, ornaments, or embellishments may be found in archeological evidence. The oldest known arguably cartographic artifact is a landscape scene engraved inside a stone wall of a sixth-century A.D. tomb at Kurayoshi, Tottori prefecture (Unno 1994, 1996) which may be linked with a local *kami* (spirit(s)) cult, a forebear to what is now known as Shintō (“the way of the spirits”). The line work in the mural has reduced the landscape to its essentials and captures what most likely were two *torii* (“bird perches,” gateways that separate sacred territory from the profane), a bridge, two *sandō* (approaches, that is pathways leading to the interior of a shrine complex), two buildings, several trees, and evidently two birds, giving the scene the appearance of what would nowadays be called a shrine compound. Dismissing the fact that this was not a diagram to be used by a living person, and not worrying about why it was chiseled into the wall of a tomb, it may be seen as a predecessor of a whole genre of shrine and temple maps which flourished at least from early in the fourteenth century and continues to exist today, and it may be surmised that this was not the only time that the idea of drawing a landscape had occurred to people in the archipelago in or by the sixth century.

Two more archeological pieces of evidence are more remarkable because their lining and coloring went beyond desired essentials of a landscape to displaying abstract images of Chinese origin. These are the celestial diagrams engraved on the ceilings of the tombs inside the Kitora and Takamatsuzuka burial mounds, both of ca. 700 A.D. at Asuka, which also are accompanied by colorful murals of cosmological significance (Miyajima 1994, 1998, 1999; Potter 2001b, 2005; Asuka Hozon Zaidan 2001; Takamatsuzuka Hekiga Kan 2000). The Kitora star map must have used a scientific model since it is on an azimuthal equidistant projection and has circles for the outer perimeter (constant invisibility), equator, limit of the circumpolar stars

(constant visibility), and – although a technical mistake since it should be slightly oblate – ecliptic, while most of the 28 lunar lodges that mark the path of the moon through its monthly cycle as well as other constellations of Chinese origin may still be seen in an exaggerated but reasonably distributed format. Takamatsuzuka also has the lunar lodges and two other constellations, but the layout is purely schematic with the lodges being arranged in a square and no lines existing for constant invisibility, the equator, constant visibility, and the ecliptic. In both tombs, cosmological direction was illustrated by colorful murals of Genbu (Black Warrior, a turtle and a snake), Seiryū or Seiryō (Blue [or Green] Dragon), Suzaku or Shujaku (Red Bird), and Byakko (White Tiger) for north, east, south, and west respectively, while Kitora seems to have also had smaller, colorful murals to represent the twelve animals of the Chinese zodiac which have both spatial and daily temporal associations, the tiger for example symbolizing east-north-east and the two-hour block of 3-5 a.m.

Throughout the eighth century Buddhism became entrenched in the Japanese cultural scene, which eventually led to a religious synthesis with the indigenous cults. Buddhism brought to Japan a Hindu cosmological view that had been reshaped in China and was to undergo Japanese revision as new information became available, even as late as the nineteenth century. The focal region was the immensely vertical, abstractly hierarchical (and imaginary) Mount Sumeru, around which were seas, mountain ranges, and islands, one of the last being the world of the human beings known as Jambudvīpa in Sanskrit and Senbushū and Enbudai (both also used with the prefix Nan-, “south”) in Japanese. The Buddhist Jambudvīpa focused on the countries of ancient India, had a shape which approximated that of the Indian subcontinent, and in the Far East was amended notably to include Chinese, Korean, and Japanese territories (Unno 1994 and elsewhere in Harley and Woodward 1992, 1994; Muroga and Unno 1962). Although the earliest known diagram of this cosmology in Japan is engraved on one of the mid-eighth-century bronze lotus petals beneath the giant statue of the buddha Vairocana at the temple Tōdaiji in Nara, several paper maps of Jambudvīpa from 1364 and the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries are known to exist (Unno 1994; Muroga and Unno 1962). Their purpose seems to have been explanatory rather than for such utilitarian uses as travel or finding places, and the version of 1364 at the temple Hōryūji in Ikaruga, near Nara, is a spectacular sample of medieval Japanese art (Cortazzi 1983 has a good reproduction).

Both the Chinese celestial layout, an astronomical tradition which influenced Japanese celestial cartography deep into the Edo Period (1603-1867), and the

Buddhist interpretation of Jambudvīpa were continental ideas that had a profound impact on Japanese knowledge and thought throughout the millennium of cultural crystallization mentioned earlier. The Japanese view of both celestial and terrestrial space, however, started to change with the short-lived introduction of *Nanban* (“South Barbarian,” that is Spanish and Portuguese) culture in the latter half of the sixteenth century and, more profoundly and in a period of political stability, with the eighteenth-century translations and other works of Japanese specialists known as “Dutch Scholars.” Through the Dutch trading facilities at Dejima in Nagasaki, reasonably novel European knowledge and cultural artifacts were introduced to Japanese scholars, among which were celestial and terrestrial maps and globes which gave different impressions from those derived from ancient Chinese and Buddhist scholarship. During the following two centuries the Japanese view of the world, as expressed in celestial and terrestrial cartography, came to be the same as that which is conventionally understood by Europeans and Americans today (Unno 1994 and Miyajima 1994 for samples).

Such grand schemes were originally imported and, at least prior to the emergence of Japan as a significant power on the world stage since the last decade of the nineteenth century, essentially intellectual devices for explanation or education and, in the case of astronomy, for such things as prognostication. A sense of independent cultural innovation may however be seen in Japanese maps of Japan, its provinces and counties, its settlements and religious institutions, the transportation routes that crossed the country, and even imaginary places. Keeping in mind the fact that Japan was essentially a closed country from the middle of the Heian Period until the end of the Edo, Japan was the “world” of concern to its inhabitants, and many old maps of this world and its parts which have come down to the present are not only geographical documents but also interesting works and even masterpieces in some cases of pictorial art. Although they provide insights into how Japanese viewed their terrestrial space, many also fit into broad artistic traditions and established precedents for illustrated maps in more recent decades.

The evolution of maps of Japan demonstrates a concern with scientific accuracy, which became pronounced from the latter Edo Period onward, yet many extant old national maps exhibit a greater tendency toward relativity, smoothed shapes, and visual appeal (e.g. Kokuritsu Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsukan 1988; Cortazzi 1983; Unno 1994). Originating in the genre which somehow was coined “Gyōki,” after the bodhisattva Gyōki (668-749) who played an important role in securing Buddhism

in Japan and was involved in commissioning the statue of Vairocana with the etching of the Sumeru world at its feet, national maps are known to have been made as far back as the second half of the thirteenth century with an eighteenth-century sample referring to an original of ca. 805 (Unno 1994). These Gyōki maps and their modifications comprise smoothly delineated provincial boundaries with a high proportion of arcs and a series of major roads emanating almost lazily out of the central province of Yamashiro, the locus of the capital Heian (Kyōto). Occasionally, they were embellished with a dragon surrounding the archipelago as in the 1624 *Dainihonkoku Jishin no Zu* (Map about Earthquakes in the Country of Great Japan) that contains written messages about the significance of earthquakes in each month of the year (Unno 1994).

Although Gyōki maps continued to be produced as late as the Edo Period for ornamental purposes, they relinquished their status as serious national maps to those which were compiled from seventeenth-century provincial surveys commissioned by the Tokugawa shogunate or based to some degree on them. Many of these were improvements on the Gyōki tradition and maintained a picture quality through bright colors and smooth, often arced lines to mark the provinces in particular, and publishers went further in regard to illustrative content. It would appear that an appeal to esthetic sensitivity was required to make most of the national maps marketable, their use outside official circles having revolved around a taste for geographical knowledge and ornamental curiosity, and this is particularly underscored by pictorial artists and/or their schools having produced some remarkable specimens. Various sources reproduce Edo-Period national maps (e.g. Unno et al. 1972; Cortazzi 1983; Unno 1994; Kokuritsu Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsukan 1988), but an interesting example for illustrative purposes is a *Fusōkoku no Zu* of 1666 that is reproduced by Cortazzi (1983). Although most national maps call Japan *Nihon* or *Nihonkoku* (“sun-origin” or “sun-origin-country”), this one uses the poetic nickname *Fusōkoku* which has characters meaning “help-mulberries-country,” a reference to the silk trade, and while the shapes of the archipelago cross the Gyōki tradition with one of the national maps compiled from the Tokugawa surveys, the smooth, generally rounded lines for the boundaries and roads, bright color, pictures of Japanese trading vessels at sea, and neat calligraphy make this work far more of an artistic composition than a scientific document.

The best known artist to have made an impact on Japanese cartography was Ishikawa Ryūsen, who created a national map that became the model for a genre which

lasted for roughly a century from 1687. Ishikawa had studied under the famous master Hishikawa Moronobu who consolidated the popular pictorial genre known as *ukiyo-e*, the “floating-world pictures” that included distorted studies of ordinary life, unguarded moments behind formal settings, sexual activity, and landscapes (Fahr-Becker 2001). Dated 1687, Ishikawa’s *Honchō Zukan Kōmoku* (Pictorial Classification of This Period; e.g. in Unno 1994 and Cortazzi 1983) was derived from a *Fusōkoku no Zu* of 1647 and established the “Ryūsen-type” genre of maps that combined improvements on the Gyōki topographical traits with pictorial embellishments. More than the *Fusōkoku no Zu*, Ishikawa’s colorful maps included trading ships at sea, mountains, castles, and neat calligraphy, and they provided a reasonably stable impression of the island country, not far from which were other territories such as the Korean peninsula, Hokkaidō, and islands that are exaggerated in size and location. Although they had earlier rivals, the Ryūsen maps were eclipsed as the leading cartographic genre from 1779, when the polymath Nagakubo Sekisui produced the topographically detailed *Kaisei Nihon Yochi Rotei Zenzu* (Revised Complete Map of the World and Routes of Japan) that has a much more sophisticated outline of the islands and a longitude and latitude grid with several European compass roses, including the Bourbon fleur-de-lis, at intersections (Unno 1994; Cortazzi 1983).

Such national maps are planar perspectives, but oblique ones composed with greater artistic license and called “bird’s-eye views” (*chōkanzu*) in Japanese also were produced in the nineteenth century. Two outstanding examples by *ukiyo-e* artists are Kuwagata Keisai’s *Nihon Meisho no E* (Picture of Famous Places in Japan, ca. 1804) and Kisai Rishō’s *Dainihon Meisho Ichiran* (A Look at Famous Places in Great Japan, mid nineteenth century), reproductions being in Cortazzi (1983) for example. Kuwagata’s composition of greens and browns bends the archipelago into a virtually U-shaped boomerang, emphasizes its mountains with the better known ones having their character drawn out, squeezes in castles, and has many small sailboats that plied the coastal waters for domestic trade, while Kisai’s map uses lighter, brighter colors, straightens out the archipelago, also emphasizes the mountains and draws out the characteristics of famous ones, shows castles, and has a lot of the small sailboats for domestic trade.

Oblique perspectives were also used in some route maps that covered a significant part of the country, an early example being the *Tōkaidō Michiyuki no Zu* (Map for Going Along the East Sea Road, ca. 1654) and another being the *Tōkaidō Meisho Ichiran* (A Look at Famous Places of the East Sea Road, mid nineteenth century) by

the well-known *ukiyo*e artist Katsushika Hokusai (in Unno 1994 and Cortazzi 1983 respectively). Both depict the mountainous landscape and are rather detailed, the latter immensely distorting the topography but showing numerous buildings, other structures such as Nihonbashi (Bridge of Japan, the starting point of the road in Edo), an enormous Mount Fuji, and many of the sailboats for coastal trade. Other route maps combined planar and oblique perspectives or were planar cartograms that focused on the roads and adjusted them with little care for topographic reality (e.g. Unno 1994).

Maps of smaller areas inside Japan were also produced, and the propensity was for them to be *ezu* in the sense of an illustrated work. The earliest extant ones date to the middle of the eighth century and address land reclaimed for cultivating rice, with another being devoted to the premises of the temple Tōdaiji, and these are followed in the extant record by medieval maps of manors and religious institutions and Edo-Period maps of villages, cities, rivers, mountainous areas, religious institutions, and pilgrimage routes (Unno 1994; Hisatake and Hasegawa 1993; Katsuragawa Ezu Kenkyūkai 1988, 1989; Rekishikan Izumisano 1998; Ōtsu-Shi et al. 2000). In such maps, salient features of the landscape were drawn into the map certainly as reference points but also as a means to bring life to an otherwise visually boring or even tedious document. Rural subjects offered opportunities for portraying mountains, with the likes of realistic trees and buildings often included, while urban maps could have appropriately drawn natural features as well as buildings, compounds, and other structures of note.

A particular genre that is worth mentioning is the *shajikeidaizu* (diagrams of the premises of shrines and temples) which were primarily artistic compositions from, especially, the fourteenth century onward to show the grounds of religious institutions and/or to be used for religious activities such as prayer in absentia (Kokuritsu Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsukan 2001; Ōita Kenritsu ... Rekishi Minzoku Shiryōkan 1995; Katsuragawa Ezu Kenkyūkai 1988, 1989; Potter 2003). In these documents the buildings, mountains, trees, and other aspects of the landscape could be drawn in as if viewed head-on (i.e. facing one or two sides) or from an oblique elevated angle, with both types of perspective and different visual orientations often occurring within one composition. A subset, also a subset of Japanese mandalas themselves (Grotenhuis 1999), are the “shrine mandalas” (*miyamandara*) that were colorful depictions of religious compounds and their surroundings, some of which include people in period costume going about their business on the premises or metaphysical

characters that remind viewers of karma, nirvana, and such like.

Japanese “Picture-Diagrams” and the Study of Cartography Past

The heritage of Japanese illustrated and pictorial maps may, in sum, be traced into antiquity, with a very strong extant record from the fourteenth century onward, and be seen to encompass a diverse set of cartographic themes that were not preoccupied with accurate locations and proportionately correct distributions. During and since the Meiji Period, that is the “modern” time frame in which Japan has come to be a major player on the world scene and has been stimulated culturally by Europe and North America, this tradition has continued to exist. Today such maps may be seen in conventionally published media – books, magazines, brochures, pamphlets, and sheets – as well as on stationary media for public display, while some maps are treated as ornaments in themselves as, for example, on key chains and postcards. Whether with illustrations, entirely illustrative, or as ornaments, such rather common maps reveal a popular appreciation for the artistic qualities of cartography, perhaps more so than the scientific since the illustrative material or, in the case of the ornaments, territorial shape are likely to command attention beyond the time that is required for functional usage. Obviously there is some sort of cultural continuity in this, hence a few general (but not necessarily definitive) points from the perspective of culture follow, while a useful way to wrap up this article is to refer to the importance of studying maps as pieces of art.

One point is that Japanese illustrated and pictorial maps, past and even present, are examples of applied geography and astronomy within a cultural framework. Although the most typical uses would be locating places and identifying topographic space, others combine these with political administration and control, commerce, education, intellectual curiosity, and/or ornamentation. To get the required information or impression across for such purposes, it is reasonable to assume that dots, lines, abstract symbols, and labels would have sufficed to transmit the diagrammatic (*zu*) essentials, at least for those trained to understand them. Such abstraction might be termed the cartographic *honne*, a term which Japanese use to describe the reality of things that need not be pleasing, desirable, appetizing, or readily understandable. To balance *honne*, Japanese create images, impressions, roles, and the like that are more idealistic in a positive sense and fall into the domain of *tatemaie*, analogous to “pretense,” which is where the pictorial (*e*) quality of the maps comes

in. In this context, perhaps not obvious to non-Japanese students of cartography, the ornamentation itself has been and continues to be a practical trait of Japanese culture, not least of all to make something which has been abstracted from reality less abstract and thereby more understandable by reducing the amount of mental work that abstractions often require.

A second point is that Japanese illustrated and pictorial maps over the centuries have played to the beat of popular or modestly well-to-do culture, although it might be argued that the artists contributed to its formation and consolidation. The readily accessible language is a dead giveaway, but on the visual side, the illustrative material has been concerned with forms and appearance (the *tatema*) that include depicting natural scenery, buildings, other architectural structures, people, and other characters in ways that an “ordinary” person, not a specialist or a member of the social elite, would be encouraged to appreciate. This is not to deny that works of an esoteric nature have existed – certainly some maps with astronomical, nautical, land-based topographic, and religious content clearly required training to interpret – but the cartographic record in Japan does demonstrate a connection with the lives of “common” people.

Third, past and even present illustrated and pictorial maps provide insights into Japanese approaches to the landscape, be they views on or ways to handle it. The typical use of selective emptiness, occasionally expressed through neatly clouding out undesirable elements but more typically created by leaving out details on maps, is an exercise in knowing or choosing what to ignore, something which Japanese have learned to do as they go about their business. What the maps have done through their selective emptiness and, in many cases, relative simplicity is to point out landmarks or whatever needs to be seen, and it is very likely for example that a temple would be noticed and remembered, but not the shops, roads, vehicles, and whatnot nearby. Mountains, for instance, have been prominent in illustrated maps, not surprising given their omnipresence throughout the archipelago, and they can provide dramatic backdrops and, with exceptions, tend to have been drawn into maps with gently arcing lines. Similarly, such elements of the cultural landscape as buildings, farmland, boats, and people engaged in activities have been drawn into maps in ways that are both easily recognizable and not hostile to the eye of the map reader, which suggests that esthetic comfort has often been at least as important as portraying information.

These comments hint at themes which require further elaboration and spin-offs,

but some “key words” from the last three paragraphs include applied geography and astronomy, *honne* and *tatema*, popular culture, selective emptiness, simplicity, and esthetics. Although scholars, dilettantes, and others who study, collect, or otherwise work with maps, especially old ones, might quickly understand the validity of such a set of “key” expressions, the tendency of geographers and historians of geography and/or cartography has been to focus on the “applied,” often interpreted as “scientific,” side when using or studying old maps. An important reason for using or studying old maps has been to extract topographic information about the past, while another has been to see what geographical knowledge existed or – whether true, false, or a combination – was at least shown. For those doing detective-like work on past environments or the state of science (as in knowledge), this makes sense, but this approach to using and studying old maps has led to an ingrained bias among geographers, historians of geography, and (because nearly all of them have a home in geography departments) historians of cartography, something which may be adduced to the aspirations of geographers to be seen as “scientists.” This has, however, led to significant neglect of the artistic side of cartographic history as well as of the entire discipline of geography, which is sad given that sketches, drawings, paintings, photography, and such like have played an important role in the creation and dissemination of geographical knowledge. In this context, paying more attention to the artistic side of cartography would seem to be in order, and old Japanese maps provide an excellent “data base” for a case study in cultural geography, past and present.

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