



Mapping Asia: Cartography and the Construction of Territoriality. Gotha: November 24-25, 2022.

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Dominic Keyßner on Mapping Asia: Cartography and the Construction of Territoriality

Without any doubt, maps were crucial for any imperial project, but their role was often complex and ambiguous. Although maps enabled the appropriation of spaces and the construction of (contested) territoriality that reverberates until today, cartography was by no means a purely European and imperial medium. Especially regarding Asia, modern European production of cartography was deeply intertwined with Asian actors and agencies, interacting and translating from different cartographic traditions. Nevertheless, maps were also used as media of counter-mapping to assert local territorial claims to challenge European colonial demands. Consequently, in order to assess the role of cartography in the construction of territoriality/territorialities in Asia, we must address modes of translation and counter-mapping, local cartographic traditions, and local knowledge incorporated within European maps. The conference *Mapping Asia: Cartography and the Construction of Territoriality* aimed to explore these trajectories: How were ideas of territoriality cartographically produced? How were they circulated and interpreted within Asia? Finally, how were these maps received and utilized between Europe and Asia?

The event took place in Gotha at the Centre for Transcultural Studies from November 24 to 25,

2022, and was organized by Claudia Berger (Erfurt University/CTS Gotha), Frances O'Morchoe (Yale University), and Annika Dörner (Erfurt University/CTS Gotha) as part of the digitization project *Cartographies of Africa and Asia (1800–1945)*, a project for the digitization of maps of the Perthes Collection Gotha (KarAfAs). [KarAfAs digitized more than thirty-five thousand sheets](#) of the Perthes Collection's cartographic material on Africa and Asia by the end of January 2023. The Perthes Collection contains not only the holdings of the Justus Perthes Publishing House, one of the most important German cartographic institutions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but also a wide variety of cartographic data collections, hand-drawn sketch maps as well as historical maps, and the Perthes company's own finalized designs, which were also included in the digitization effort. The conference, which invited international experts on Asian cartography from a variety of academic disciplines, contained four panels that sought to discuss the production of territoriality, borders, and cartographic knowledge from the late eighteenth to the twentieth century. It also included a session in the Perthes Collection, where participants had the chance to examine some of the most memorable artifacts of the holdings in relation to the cartography of Asia.

The welcome by Iris Schröder (Erfurt University/CTS Gotha), director of the Centre for Transcultural Studies, emphasized the scientific aspirations of the digitization project and its relevance to the conference itself. Following this introduction, the first panel looked at different cartographic definitions of “Asia,” semantically placing the continent in different territorial settings. Sandeep Bhardwaj (Yale/Ashoka University, India) showed how Indian elites’ territorial conceptualizations of Asia had been shifting throughout the twentieth century. In the wake of Indian nationalist movements and the expanding influence of Hinduism, the concept of India as part of East Asia emerged after the First World War. However, after the Second World War the idea of India and its positionality changed in the framework of military and strategic thinking, as elites recontextualized India at the center of the Indian Ocean. José Miguel Vidal Kunstmann (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile) followed up with a talk on the *Comprehensive Map of Heaven and Earth (Tiandi quantu 天地全圖)*. The map was published by the Chinese scholar Lü Fu 呂撫 in 1722 and only five copies are extant. Lü Fu drew on Korean, Jesuit, and Chinese cartographic sources and placed China in the center of the concentrically arranged map. This depiction reflected cosmographic notions of heaven and earth and included elements of mythology as well as hydrographic information. The map produced a perception of Asia that was primarily tied to the Qing Dynasty, integrating Chinese cosmographic traditions with Jesuit concepts. Both talks pointed out that “Asia” was by no means a fixed spatial concept. The construction of its territoriality, rather, depended on the perspective of actors, their ideologies, and the different cultural and historical contexts in which the cartographic works were produced.

After a lively debate, the participants visited the Perthes Collection. Petra Weigel (Gotha), head of the Perthes Collection, gave a brief introduction on the history of the publishing house Justus Perthes Gotha by presenting some of the highlights of

the collection, such as *Stieler’s Hand-Atlas* (first edition 1834–45) and Heinrich Berghaus’s *Atlas of Asia* (ca. 1832–37). Subsequently, Iris Schröder, Patrick Müller (Erfurt University/CTS Gotha), Frances O’Morchoe, and Claudia Berger presented a variety of materials from the collection. While Müller gave an insight into Bruno Hassenstein’s cartographic projects on Japan and the Japanese maps he based his work on, Schröder showcased a bestseller of the Perthes Publishing House: the [Chart of the World](#). Since this map was widely received and published in various languages, the collection also holds a Japanese edition that was introduced by Müller and Schröder. O’Morchoe presented a map of an Austro-Hungarian expedition in Burma together with archival materials that showed how representation of local borders was hotly debated during the making of the map. Lastly, Claudia Berger took a closer look at a [hand-drawn map of Shandong Province \(1876\)](#) by Albert-Auguste Fauvel for Robert Hart, and introduced the participants to the database of the digitization project.

In the afternoon, the second panel shed light on processes of knowledge production involved in the creation of maps. The extensive trip to the Perthes Collection already inspired discussions on the cartographic processes, questions of translation, and the transmission of local knowledge into European cartography. Drawing on a map from the Gotha cartographer August Petermann, Ines Eben von Racknitz (FU Berlin) unveiled the violence underlying European knowledge production in Asia. European powers used conflicts like the Taiping Rebellion to update their maps, as Eben von Racknitz demonstrated via the example of John Ward’s mapping of the Yangtze River in 1858. Ward’s violent military expedition relied on Chinese cartography as well as on the knowledge of local river guides to map the Yangtze. Petermann then used Ward’s survey maps to compile a new map for a European audience, creating new ways of looking at China while obscuring the violent background underlying this knowledge

production. Vera Dorofeeva-Lichtmann (CNRS-EHESS, France/MPIWG Berlin) reversed the perspective by looking at a manuscript map by the Chinese astronomer Li Mingche 李明徹 (1751–1832), who created one of the earliest maps of the Qing Empire to use lines of longitude and latitude. Dorofeeva-Lichtmann traced the map's reception in Europe and Asia. Li Mingche aimed to provide an updated edition of the provincial gazetteers and decided to include a synoptic map of the Qing Empire. In order to conceive this “modern” and “general map,” he used maps by the French geographer Jean-Baptiste Bourguignon d'Anville, applying the results of the latest surveys of the Qing Dynasty and a pseudocylindrical projection. Since both talks focused on China, the discussion addressed especially the depiction of mountains and rivers in Chinese maps as well as the question of borders and the corresponding idea of national territoriality. The panel emphasized that the processes of knowledge production guiding the cartographic designs of Asia were not one-sided but rather reciprocal, involving Asian as well as European actors.

Starting on Friday with a panel on “borderlands,” Shah Mahmoud Hanifi (James Madison University, USA) outlined the cartographic history of Afghanistan and its territorial configuration over the *longue durée*. Rather than conceiving the mapping of Afghanistan as an imperial practice creating an imperial borderland in the periphery, he suggested thinking of it as a center, emphasizing its cultural composition and geographical features. He pointed out how our present-day understanding of Afghanistan and its borders was shaped through colonial cartography. Especially the colonial projects of Great Britain in India and later Afghanistan, as well as Russia's conquest of Siberia shaped the Afghani territory from outside, ignoring its inherent political entities and inscribing a colonial cartographic tradition that needs to be challenged. Yonglin Jiang (Bryn Mawr College, USA) then described how the independent territory of the Miao people was transformed into a

part of the imperial domain of the Qing Dynasty. Jiang proposed to read this as an act of “inward imperialism.” While imperial maps claimed that the Miao territory was part of the empire, the situation on the spot was the complete opposite. The Wuliang Shan mountain range helped the Miao to resist the incursions of the Qing Empire. As the imperial forces were not able to conquer the territory, they built the Miaojiang Great Wall to isolate the Miao population. At that point, the Qing Dynasty established imperial institutions around the Laershan plateau of the Miao. Qing imperial institutions used maps and texts to mark the Miao and their territory as a cultural Other and a potential political threat. Next, Chechesh Kudachinova (Universität Mannheim) explored how and why the Altai Mountains emerged on Russian imperial maps between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, tracing the transformation of this ambiguous geographical space into a clearly delineated entity. Particularly in the middle of the eighteenth century, the Altai Mountains sparked the interest of both the Russian Empire and the Qing Empire, making it a trans-imperial frontier and border region, which was anything but clearly delineated. The Russian navigator Ivan Isleniev surveyed the frontier territories in the middle of the eighteenth century. Although his maps articulated territorial claims in the sense of J. B. Harley's cartographic “weapons of imperialism,” the Altai Mountains were a highly dynamic frontier between the Mongols, the Manchus, the Russian Empire, and the Qing Empire. The survey maps that accompanied border agreements in 1864 between the Russian and the Qing Empire transformed the “blank spaces” into a border area with fixed boundary lines, but also changed the vision of the Altai Mountains from individual mountains to a mountain range. All talks emphasized that maps were constitutive instruments for laying claim on territoriality and borders, while also functioning as tools of governance. At the same time, the papers showed that the local situation on the ground

rarely matched the cartographic imagination, frequently challenging it instead.

The opening presentation in the final panel, “Japan—Localities and Globalisation,” was by Michael Kinski, Koray Birenheide, and Luca Ciani (Goethe University Frankfurt). They introduced their digitization project, “The Digital *On Edo ezu* 御江戸絵図,” which explored how the local population might have experienced historical maps of early modern Edo. Michael Kinski introduced the multiple approaches to mapmaking in early modern Japan, built on different world views ranging from Buddhist cosmography to the idea of Europeans as barbarians from the south. Luca Ciani showed how city maps came into vogue during the early nineteenth century and spread via household encyclopedias. He gave us a closer look at the website as well as the central map of the project, *On Edo ezu* (1831–45). The team used the *On Edo ezu* map as groundwork and combined it with information from contemporaneous colored woodblock prints by Utagawa Hiroshige. They then annotated the resulting data sets with corresponding source material and sorted them into categories to allow a more systematized overview of how places changed over time. Lastly, Koray Birenheide gave insights into the technical dimension of the digitization project. He highlighted the possibilities of using the same open-source software for other cartographic projects. Afterward, Mengfei Pan (Kokugakuin University, Japan) examined cartographic directories published in nineteenth-century Meiji Japan to show how the mapping of a select set of actors, communities, and local places produced urban and touristic spaces. These cartographic directories were used as community maps or touristic maps that had objectives contrary to the cartographic projects promoted by the Meiji authorities. By mapping local social groups like artists, politicians, or industrialists, these maps reflected the process of urbanization, which escalated during the Meiji Restoration. The maps were distributed to tourists and visitors to draw their attention to local businesses. The

question of authorship was secondary, since these maps were constantly copied and mapmaking was viewed as a collective process. In this regard, these cartographic directories mainly served commercial purposes that were initiated by a privileged class of people. Lastly, by directing our attention to the Pacific Ocean, Jonas Rüegg (Harvard University/University of Zürich) discussed the role of Japanese geographers and explorers in the making of a global Pacific and the discourse about Japan’s positionality in the Pacific Ocean. Due to a radical geopolitical reorientation during the course of the Meiji Restoration, the Japanese perception of the Pacific Ocean changed drastically: instead of the idea of the Pacific (*Taiheiyō*) as a vast space that stretched behind the Kuroshiro Frontier, it was now integrated as an extension of the archipelagic world of Japan as the South Sea (*Nan’yō*). This turned the islands of the Kuroshio Frontier into a gateway and transformed the Pacific relative to Japan’s South Sea into a space for colonial ambitions.

In a wrap-up of the conference, Claudia Berger and Frances O’Morchoe sketched out the initial ideas and conception of the conference. All panels addressed certain aspects of the mapping of Asia—the production of territorial ideas and knowledge, the question of cartographic scale, the significance of local and global networks, or the function of maps as paper tools of empire. A concluding discussion addressed especially practices of border making in the construction of territoriality. The discussion also picked up on key questions that were raised during the conference: processes of bordering, power relations, and the organization of space. Concerning the role of cartography in the construction of borders and territories, much remains to be explored.

Conference Overview

Thursday, November 24, 2022

Official Welcome by Iris Schröder, Professor of Global History and Director of the Centre for Transcultural Studies

Panel 1: Definitions of “Asia”

Chair: Claudia Berger (Erfurt University/CTS Gotha)

Sandeep Bhardwaj (Ashoka University, India): “Defining ‘Asia’: Multiple Views of Asian Geography in the Indian Discourse (1919–1947)”

José Miguel Vidal Kunstmann (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile): “Accommodation, Centrality, and Symmetry in Lü Fu 呂撫 (1671–1742)’s ‘Comprehensive Map of Heaven and Earth’” (*Tiandi quantu* 天地全圖, 1722)”

Visit to the Perthes Collection

Welcome by Petra Weigel, Head of the Perthes Collection/Gotha Research Library

Presentations of a selection of artifacts by Iris Schröder, Patrick Müller, Frances O’Morchoe, and Claudia Berger

Panel 2: Knowledge Production

Chair: Annika Dörner (Erfurt University/CTS Gotha)

Ines Eben von Racknitz (FU Berlin): “Mapping War in China: The Case of the Taiping Rebellion in 1858–1860”

Vera Dorofeeva-Lichtmann (CNRS-EHES, France/ MPIWG Berlin): “Chinese Manuscript Map of the Qing Empire (ca. 1819–32), rediscovered in the Göttingen State and University Library: A Hybrid Cartography Case”

Friday, November 25, 2022

Panel 3: Borderlands

Chair: Frances O’Morchoe (Yale University)

Shah Mahmoud Hanifi (James Madison University, USA): “Hindu Kush Maps in the Cartographic History of Afghanistan”

Yonglin Jiang (Bryn Mawr College, USA): “Mapping a Miao Place: The Construction of the

Colonized ‘Miao Territory’ in Qing Dynasty Cartography”

Chechesh Kudachinova (Universität Mannheim): “Closing The Gap Between Two Empires: The Altay Mountains in Russian Imperial Imaginaries and Realities”

Panel 4: Japan – Localities and Globalisation

Chair: Claudia Berger (Erfurt University/CTS Gotha)

Michael Kinski, Koray Birenheide, Luca Ciani (Universität Frankfurt): “An Early Modern Japanese Map Goes Digital. The *On Edo ezu* as an Interactive Resource”

Mengfei Pan (Kokugakuin University, Japan): “Mapping the Local Persona: Cartographic Directories in Meiji Japan”

Jonas Rüegg (Harvard/Universität Zürich): “*Nan’yō*, or: The Invention of Japan’s Pacific”

Conclusion of the Event

Claudia Berger (Erfurt University/CTS Gotha) and Frances O’Morchoe (Yale University)

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-maps>

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