Imperial Practice and the Making of Modern Japan’s Territory: Towards a Reconsideration of Empire’s Boundaries

Edward BOYLE

Abstract A renewed focus on the notion of empire has prompted an interest in questions of modern Japanese imperialism after the Meiji Restoration, both in Japan and abroad. It has also focused attention on the issue of comparing empires across Eurasia during the early modern period, under the rubric of ‘global history’. Japan has not really been incorporated into this latter discussion. This article begins by examining the reasons for this lack of incorporation, before moving on to discuss the value of considering early modern Japan as an imperial formation. The lens it adopts is one of cartography, that quintessentially imperial practice that has featured heavily in discussions of a Eurasian early modernity. The article examines the cartographic incorporation of Japan’s northern region of the Yezo into Japan itself, culminating in the area being newly designated as Hokkaido in the early Meiji period, the newest circuit within Imperial Japan’s administrative map. This political outcome was the result of varied practices that found reflection across the Tokugawa–Meiji divide. Yet this intense variety of practices, constantly shifting in response to contingency, served to form the state-effect, through which the land of Yezo was granted its unity and represented on the map. The territory on the map provided the visual, graphic representation of the demarcation of authority of the state that authorized the practice of its own mapping. In this manner, the state mapped itself into Hokkaido and from this perspective, the division between the early modern and modern eras is far less significant than is frequently assumed.

Key words Japan, Empire, Mapping, Ezo, Hokkaido

Introduction

In 1909, in that valedictory celebration of Japanese progress, Fifty Years of New Japan, Sato Shosuke explained to the world how it was that the territory of Yezo had been transformed into Hokkaido under the rule of the Meiji state. According to Sato, “The Government was restored to the Imperial House in 1867, and Yezo thereupon became a part of the realm under direct Imperial rule. In accordance with the policy, laid down centuries before by the Emperor Jimmu, of extending Imperial influence and dominions northward, a meeting was called in March 1868, to discuss, in the Imperial presence, how to reclaim the island, with the result that soon afterwards a Colonial Government was established at Hakodate” (Okuma 1909: II, 516). Possession, history, and modernity all came together to justify this singular achievement of the new government, the ultimate success of which is shown by the fact that unlike “our new possessions of Sakhalien,” it remains Japanese today, with its possession permitting that most convenient shorthand when describing Japan, as consisting of four main islands. Yet this fact, largely undisputed in the century since Sato wrote, is a product of the New Japan being celebrated: Hokkaido is one of Japan’s islands, and made so through this extension of “Imperial influence and dominion.”

The wide-ranging imperial turn which has enamored American academia in particular since the turn of the millennium (Burton 2003; Howe 2008) has also found reflection in Japan, which is experiencing its own debates on how to study empire and measure the impact of Japan’s imperial history on its current, resolutely national, present (Yamamoto 2003). Although the contemporary resonance of the subject of empire in Japan is less intense, there has been a much greater attention paid to both how Japan’s empire was managed and the manner in which those whom it incorporated were governed (Caprio 2014). This has led to renewed consideration being given to the connections that exist between Japan’s empire and its postwar history, as well as how they had been concealed through nationalized historical narratives after empire’s collapse.

The increased attention to the notion of empire has once again led to Hokkaido being noted as the first step...
in Japanese imperialism. At the time Sato was writing, of course, this Empire had already come to incorporate the Ryukyus, Taiwan, Karafuto and, as a leased territory, Kwantung, while the protectorate of Korea would be formally annexed to Japan the following year, so this perspective is a recovery of the dominant view up until the end of the war in East Asia. Given that, as is well known, the Meiji state immediately set up the kaitakushi (Development Agency) under American direction to settle the territory, Hokkaido's character as a colonial laboratory is obvious, and that such a view needed to be recovered reflects the forgetting demanded by nationalized histories (Renan 1990; Stoler 2009). However, the danger is that excessive attention to such a perspective falls prey to the temptation of ascribing notions working to justify or legitimate empire, along with the practices they underpinned, as being ones which emerged within the West before being forcibly spread to the rest of the world. This reduces states like Japan to a position of mimicry, seeking to imitate more powerful imperial competitors, and has long been a trope in writings on Japanese history (Eskildsen 2002; Suzuki 2009). It is the contention of this article that the policies and practices of Imperial Japan display connections not only with those of other European empires, but also with Japan's own history, and that it would have been impossible for them not to have done so. Indeed, it is these connections that Sato seeks to invoke explicitly by noting the "policy laid down centuries before" as legitimizing the imposition of "direct Imperial rule."

In seeking to recover these connections in the case of Hokkaido, this article shall proceed as follows. First, it shall sketch an argument for the utility of considering Tokugawa Japan as an early modern empire, one comparable with not only European imperial formations but also those elsewhere in Eurasia. The reasons for resistance to this perspective and its possible gains shall be swiftly enumerated, and its applicability to the area now known as Hokkaido emphasized. It shall then highlight the importance of territory for both imperial states in general and Japan in particular, while noting why this aspect has been relatively underemphasized in the current imperial turn. The following section on imperial mapping shall seek to account for how this area that Sato refers to as Yezo came to be created, how the designation came to refer to a specific patch of bounded territory. In the fourth section, territorial practices, consideration shall be given to the state's practices within this defined territory, how the territory both came to be considered and acted upon within the minds of officials. The fifth section on practicing empire shall trace these practices into the period of Japan's high imperialism, before the conclusion briefly elucidates the significance that the recovery of such connections has for the study of empires in general and the Japanese variant in particular.

**Imperial Territory**

The 'imperial turn' mentioned above, and the 'new' imperial histories with which it is associated, do not identify any one coherent method, but may broadly be said to be seeking to break down the divide between empire and nation-states, frequently through the lens of discourse or culture rather than the high politics and diplomacy with which imperial histories have traditionally concerned themselves (Ghosh 2012). Given this desire to move beyond the traditional demarcation between national and imperial states, it is noticeable that work on Japan identified as emerging from within these trends remains firmly focused on post-Meiji Japan, the period of high imperialism. This is in contrast to those two empires that would come to be contiguous with Japan, those of China and Russia, who have both been beneficiaries of a flurry of studies of their early modern nature (Hostetler 2001; Perdue 2005; Burbank et al. 2007) and incorporated into a wider effort to bring imperial formations from across Eurasia into contact with one another, under the rubric of global history (Subrahmanyan 1997; Calhoun et al. 2006; Burbank and Cooper 2010). While opposition to the traditional view of Japan's early modern history associated with the notion of sakoku (Toby 1991; Walker 2002) has focussed attention on the position of Japan within this early globalization, this has largely centered upon questions of exchange, both cultural and economic (Makabe 2007; Hellyer 2009), and it remains most common to view Japan's early modern period in proto-national terms (Mitani 1997; Toby 2001; Berry 2006). While the fashion is for other early modern empires to be explicitly compared within a global framework, Tokugawa Japan has remained an outlier in this respect.

The reasons for this are fairly obvious, but bear consideration because they so frequently remain unexamined. Perhaps the most important of these is semantic; the word translated as empire in Japanese (teikoku) emerges as a consequence of the declaration of the Greater Japanese Empire in the Meiji period. Until adopted by the Meiji state, it was merely one of a number of words referring to the state of the “Son of Heaven.” Following the Japanese example, it was subsequently adopted as the official name for states in Korea, China and Vietnam,
because of Meiji Japan’s association with successful modernization. Today the word is used to refer to empires in all parts and periods of world history, in the same manner as in English. However, although utilized within Japanese historiography to refer to the early Qing dynasty in China as the Dai-shin teikoku, for example, it is not a concept used with reference to Japan’s own early modern past. This is important because it restricts the comparative framework that historians are able to utilize about the period.

This leads into the second reason for absence of such comparisons, which was the much earlier focus on the issue of Japan’s compatibility with European states viewed through the lens of the nation. A great deal of valuable work has been done from within this framework (McClain et al. 1994), which still frequently serves as a basis for large-scale comparison (Lieberman 2009). Recent criticism of the manner in which the national-scale is assumed within histories of European nations, however, is obviously also applicable to Japan within the early modern period. It seems at least worth asking the question whether the notion of the nation is the only perspective with which it is possible to understand Japan’s early modern experience, especially given the fact that its re-integration into the world during the nineteenth century was brought about as a result of inter-imperial competition, which Japan would enthusiastically enter.

There is little doubt for students of empire that its chief characteristic by comparison with the nation is its heterogeneity, both in terms of its population (“The nation-state tends to homogenize those within its borders…The concept of empire presumes that different people within the empire will be governed differently”—Burbank and Cooper 2010: 8) and its territory (“The nation-state will strive for a homogeneous territory…empires possess a far less administratively uniform territory”—Maier 2009: 102). Given that historiography on early modern Japan has clarified both the divergent patterns of governance in the various territories administered by daimyo and others (Brown 1993; Roberts 1998; Ravina 1999) and the large and increasing influence of status distinctions in the population over the period (Howell 2005), characterizing either the population or territory of the Tokugawa state as or becoming homogenous is difficult. Yet in the aftermath of the Meiji Restoration this unwieldy political apparatus appears to have been welded into a unified national core that drove imperial expansion after 1895. Nationalized history demands the suppressing of difference in the narrative of the nation.

This is precisely what imperial histories of states like Russia and China, as well as those of Europe, have sought to move away from. The goal of such methods has been to break down this distinction between national and the imperial by showing that the presentation of them as being analytically separate is itself a narrative created by the demands of national history, in which the national is that which is left when empire has gone. In Japan too, while until recently it was “largely the case today that Korea and ‘Taiwan are examined from the perspective of ‘colonial’ rule by ‘Japan,’ while Okinawa and the Ainu are understood as regional histories or issues of discrimination within ‘Japan” (Oguma 1998: 5), there has been increasing recognition that the study of the Japanese empire should not be defined by contemporary national borders. Attention has come to be paid to the colonial character of the post-Meiji experiences of Okinawa and Hokkaido and how they were locations of “internal colonialization” (Hechter 1977; Nishikawa 2001; Imanishi 2008).

In particular, the relations of the state with its ethnic others of the Ainu and Okinawans have been opened up to the sort of discursive analysis beloved of the ‘new’ imperial history. However, while they have shifted back the study of a Japanese empire that previously tended to be demarcated by the acquisition of Taiwan in 1895, notions of empire prior to this in relation to Hokkaido and Okinawa still tend to be restricted to the period after the Meiji Restoration, and thus once again relegate Japan to a position of imperial mimesis.

While this article shares with Oguma a desire not be restricted by current national borders in the study of empire, therefore, it sees these as being not merely spatial borders but temporal ones too, artificially separating off eras of history as being open to certain types of analysis but not others. This is important precisely because the new imperial histories have also emphasized that the notion there is some fundamental difference between premodern and modern empires should not be taken for granted (Phillips and Jones 2005). For example, much of the new Qing history shows the role of the Qing Empire in constructing the current boundaries of the nation-state of China, while the latter is also accused of maintaining colonial control over Tibet and Xinjiang (Rawski 1996; Millward 1999). The idea that there is a specifically modern form of imperialism which can be separated off from other forms relies on a reification of modernity, but “few would now argue that it is possible to denote a specific date when ways of thinking and material aspects of human life experienced a fundamental shift in form and function” (Latour 1993; Harvey 2004; Jones 2004). Sato Shosuke, in perceiving that the state had followed a policy
“laid down centuries before,” would have been in enthusiastic agreement.

Rather than viewing such continuities, however, as evidence of a longstanding policy “of extending Imperial influence and dominions northward,” or indeed, as the great historian of Hokkaido, Takakura Shinichiro, had it, Japan’s struggle with the timeless and universal question of native policy (Takakura 1942), it is the purpose of this essay to examine them in the light of this desire to probe afresh at the terrain of empire. The inquiring of terrain here is not accidental, for its focus shall be upon the Yezo as a territory, and the manner in which we can understand this territory is brought into being. In so doing, this study seeks to position itself at the intersection of much of the work on the region. One strand consists of that dealt with by Takakura in his study into ‘native policy,’ the relations existing between the separate(d) groups of Japanese and Ainu that would ultimately result in such familiar and tragic results in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Siddle 1996; Howell 1998; Uemura 2001). The second is the mapping undertaken of the region during the early modern period, an issue of longstanding concern for Japanese historians, who have pointed to the cartographic advances visible in Japanese representations of the region over the course of the early modern period (Funakoshi 1976; Walter 1994; Akitsuki 1999). Such studies, though, are characterized by an inevitable national teleology to the notion of mapping territory. Rather than assuming that the region is mapped with increasing accuracy into the national “geobody” (the standardized representation of the state’s territory, see Winichakul 1994), this study shall seek to analyze the cartographic history of Yezo and Hokkaido from a perspective that highlights what these maps show us regarding how Japanese saw this territory, and the role this played in how the territory was related to by Japan.

The notion of territory that I am seeking to interrogate within an Imperial context consists of two interrelated notions. The first is how land and territory were thought about, the manner in which different regions made up the geography of the state. The second relates to how territory was created, the practices that allowed for the state to act upon its territory. I consider these notions to be brought together under the aegis of mapping as a means of both representing and creating territory, and thus we might understand this as being an analysis of territory in terms of mental maps and cartographic production. The study of both of these questions through an imperial gaze has vastly increased in recent years. The varied geographies of empire have been extensively analyzed, while the notion of geography as a tool of empire has become commonplace. A key question has been how different imperial states have perceived distant or otherwise foreign territory and how these have been able to be incorporated within notions of an empire (Edney 1997; Elliott 2000; Casale 2010). It will be emphasized here that we need to move beyond understanding mapping as being a process in which a pre-given entity (Japan) increases its knowledge of a pre-existing reality (its territory); it is not sufficient to claim that notions of Japan and territory have remained static while the representation of the latter by the former has improved (Biggs 1999). This study is a first step in that direction.

In dealing with such a vast sweep of history, this study will of necessity merely offer some hints as to the utility of such an approach. It is as well to emphasize that the aim here is not to somehow prove that Japan was an empire. It is widely recognized that in the case of the British Empire, whether the state represented itself as an empire, or was described as an empire, has not stopped that state structure from being analyzed as imperial. Empire and nation here are analytical categories (Stoler and McGranahan 2007). Rather than being part or not of a Tokugawa empire, this study understands the territory of the Yezo as having been one component in early modern Japan’s imperial formation, incorporated within various “movements and tendencies” with “variable and often oblique relations to formal institutions” (Raymond Williams quoted in ibid.). Viewing the history of the Tokugawa period through the prism of empire allows us to offer new insights into the period, not only regarding the relations of the Tokugawa state with areas in which its authority was ill-defined, as in Yezo, but also in our understanding of the state itself, and the relation of this state with the later period of high imperialism. However, it is also to be hoped that it enables us to understand something crucial about empire itself, in terms of its viability as a category of analysis. For that reason, understanding the incorporation of Yezo as a process of imperial mapping stretching across the Tokugawa–Meiji divide offers an extremely valuable perspective on the history of both Japan and empire itself.

Imperial Mapping

Hokkaido was formally brought into existence on the 15th day of the 8th month of the Second Year of Meiji (September 20, 1869), when the new Meiji state decreed the Yezo renamed and administratively divided into 11 provinces (12 with Karafuto) and 86 administrative dis-
tricts. The name Hokkaido was adapted from six suggestions offered by Matsuura Takeshiro, with its designation as a *do*, or circuit, serving to incorporate the region into the geography of the *ritsuryo* imperial state, which ordered the territory of the Japan around the imperial center of Yamashiro province and the city of Kyoto. This re-designation served to mark Yezo as now being within the realm of “direct imperial rule.” The incorporation of the region into the *ritsuryo* administrative order occurred in the context of this familiar geography being officially adopted by the post-Meiji government after 1868 as the “model for” the state’s administration (Winichakul 1994). Ultimately, within the rest of Japan, the Meiji state’s efforts to organize its territory exactly along these provincial boundaries was rejected within seven years of assuming power, and Hokkaido too would eventually come to be administered as a *do* rather than through the prefectures from which it was, on the map at least, formed, remaining to this day the only one within Japan. As a result, this particular effort to remap the region may be considered more of a rhetorical success than a practical one (Figure 1).

The grounds for this remapping, however, were provided by the notion of Yezo, a transliteration of the term *ezo*(chi) that, along with “Yezo-ga-shima” and “Oshima” (Sato 1909: 513), had been utilized to designate the territory that was to be reclaimed as Hokkaido. The very term Yezo denoted an uncultivated wilderness beyond the bounds of Japanese agriculture and civilization, one associated with the people known as the *ezo*, today’s Ainu. Nevertheless, this ‘savage’ region was one that had been delimited on the map, although the location of its boundaries remained a source of contestation. This chapter will emphasize that rather than treating this territory of Yezo as existing *a priori*, we must understand how the delimitation of the territory of the Yezo was made possible because “empire reaches outward and draws, usually coercively, peoples whose difference is made explicit,” which is why such polities “possess a far less administratively uniform territory” (Burbank and Cooper 2010). However, the absence of an administrative uniformity does not prevent the emergence of this territory as a bounded political space, through which it becomes open.

Figure 1. The imperial state’s formal reorganization of space.

*Hokkaido 12-ka Koku 86 Gun Meisaizu [Detailed map of Hokkaido’s 12 Provinces and 86 Districts], Sapporo Honpukan, 1869. Courtesy of the Hokkaido University Northern Studies Collection.*
to institutionalization from the center.

As has long been recognized, mapping was central to the early modern Tokugawa order, within a Chinese-derived political context that had long demanded the presentation of maps to the political center as symbolic expressions of political subordination (Unno 1994; Yee 1994). The demands of the Tokugawa for provincial maps followed those of Hideyoshi in utilizing the coordinates of a pre-existing ritsuryo geography, whose significance is visible in the so-called gyoki-maps as well as in the long-standing notion of Japan being made up of “66 Provinces and 2 Islands” (Unno 1999). Tokugawa hegemony over the area demarcated as the ritsuryo state served as one component of its legitimacy, while the submission of maps by subordinate territorial authorities from throughout this area was a means by which shogunal hegemony was proclaimed. This submission of maps both allowed and underwrote the creation of an image of imperial control while also serving as a means of maintaining it; others included the institutionalized submission of the productivity of the land each lord ruled, labor for Shogunal projects, military manpower, and from 1635 of their actual physical presence within the Shogunal, but essentially now imperial, capital of Edo (Brown 1997; Vaporis 2008). Therefore while the Shogunal cartographers were replicating “the territorial imperatives of a particular system” they were also painting the landscape of the present in the colors of the past; a past ritsuryo geography that served to proclaim Shogunal hegemony (to invert Harley’s description of the tendency of maps to “paint the landscape of the past in the colors of the present,” see Harley et al. 2002: 54–55).

The notion of a region populated by the Yezo to the north (initially east) of the area ruled by the Imperial Court was an idea with both Chinese antecedents and of long standing. Nevertheless, this area only came to be defined with the exclusion of barbarian space from the north of Honshu and the incorporation of the rulers of the southern edge of what is now Hokkaido into the emerging Shogunal warrior regime after the 1580s. These rulers, the Matsumae family, were clearly part of this Tokugawa order, shown by their bodily presence at the shogunal center and cartographic presentation of the territorial extent of their rule (Walker 2001). However, the Matsumae were situated outside of the ritsuryo geographical framework within which all of the other Tokugawa’s subordinate officials found themselves, while lacking the assessed agricultural production that provided the framework for the representation of villages in the rest of the realm. Despite therefore being largely illegible to the state’s cartographically-produced knowledge structure, the area over which the Matsumae ruled would be granted territorial expression. The authority of the Matsumae was founded upon a monopoly of trade with the ezo, the extent of which provided a claim to territorial legitimacy by the Tokugawa state. In contrast to the other subordinate territorial rulers, who were restricted by the Bakufu’s claim to demarcate authority and adjudicate between competing territorial claims (Kawamura 1984; Sugimoto 1999; Roberts 2012), the Matsumae were able to produce and represent their own territory (Takagi 2006). This demarcation of the area created a space within which knowledge about Yezo could be developed.

A glance at any map of the region produced prior to the nineteenth century is sufficient to show that the model being created does not bear much resemblance to representations of the territory today; the location of things within space that we generally associate with cartography was clearly not a priority (Terasawa 1979). Matsumae authority spread throughout Yezo from the Matsumaechi in southern Hokkaido, overlaying pre-existing ezo trade networks running in the opposite direction, all of which remained predominantly maritime. The lists of Japanese and then ezo villages presented by the Matsumae to the Bakufu, describing the journey’s heading west or east from the town of Matsumae itself, provide more effective maps than actual representations of the land, which consequently served as a visual means of comprehending this list of ezo villages. These representations of an expanse of islands designated as the Yezo were strongly encouraged by the natural isomorphism of islands and political control that was such a feature of European as well as East Asian cartography during the period (Steinberg 2005). As a result, the notion of Yezo had come to refer to a defined area, demarcated on the map (for more details regarding the construction of Yezo territory, please refer to Boyle 2012).

The submission of maps, population registers, and items of exotic tribute all served to create the territory of the Matsumae domain and Yezo as part of the Tokugawa state. The homogenized image of territorial authority presented by Tokugawa maps has frequently been invoked to demonstrate the national character of the regime, but as the above description of how this territorial image was created suggests, this homogeneity was a result of the process of mapping itself. In fact, the ezo were defined through being “governed differently” and the territory they inhabited was in no sense “administratively uniform”, a glaring example of what was noted above regarding the early modern state, the tremendous level of dif-
ferentiation and stratification maintained and often promoted by the state and its officials at all levels. However, the ability to mobilize Yezo as a defined area was dependent upon the cultural production of this territory, shown most clearly in its representations on cartographic materials. This production reflected the imperial tendency to “exercise power through intermediaries who enjoy considerable autonomy in their own domains in return for delivery of compliance, tribute and military collaboration with the center” (Tilly and Stinchcombe 1997: 3). The actual cartographic production of the territory was an entirely contingent development, unrelated to a tighter degree of state control over the territory, any advance in mapping techniques or competition with another political authority. Rather it emerged from the specific demands of a particular place within one particular political system, one that legitimated the ability of the Matsumae to claim the territory of Yezo on the map. It is through this claim that we see the transformation of this previously unknown region into a bounded political space. This territory was not ‘naturally’ mapped as part of Japanese territory, but rather there was logic behind this mapping that was granted by the system in which the mapping took place.

**Territorial Practices**

When reflecting back on his efforts in Japan almost a decade earlier, Horace Capron, Civil War veteran, Commissioner for Agriculture in the United States, and subsequently special advisor to the Meiji government’s kaitakushi, found considerable cause for satisfaction. He had been “engaged by the Japanese Government” in the “examination of the natural resources and the climate” of Japan’s northern region of Hokkaido “with the view to its future development and settlement.” Hokkaido was “an encumbrance to the nation” when “first taken in hand” in 1871, whose “actual production did not pay for the cost of protecting and governing it.” However, under “this Commission [it has] been Geologically, Mineralogically, Trigonometrically and Hydrographically surveyed and mapped; its harbors and rivers sounded and buoyed, its coasts charts corrected, its mineral and other resources developed and extent and value ascertained, its climate thoroughly investigated.” As a result, Capron felt able to conclude that “It may truthfully be said that the work of this Department exclusively under American direction, has resulted in literally enlarging the boundaries of the Japanese Empire to the extent of the domain of this great Island of Yesso or Hokkaido” (Capron 1884).

In Capron’s view, this incorporation of Hokkaido is the outcome of the mapping and marking of the land to enable its utilization. Mapping Hokkaido into modern Japan was more than agriculture, consisting of its fisheries, shipping, the surveying and exploitation of new forms of energy and new industries, all of which reflected a modern vision frequently far in advance of realities in the rest of the state. Capron’s perspective embodies a nineteenth century enlightened belief in the possibility of improvement and the transforming potential of technology when properly applied, for the benefit of the territory itself, the state, and ultimately the human condition. Japan’s apparent eagerness to adopt such technology was why as early as 1876 it was adjudged “our nearest Western neighbor” (Griffis 1876: xi). The presence of the kaitakushi appears to confirm the notion of high imperialism as a self-consciously comparative project, which was capable of importing ‘best practice’ from elsewhere in the name of development. However, there is a clear contradiction in Capron’s account between his having been posted to “Japan’s northern region of Hokkaido” and the boundaries of the Japanese Empire only “enlarging” to incorporate “this great Island” as a result of the kaitakushi’s work. This seeming ambiguity with regard to Yezo reflected conflicting interpretations over the status of the territory. From abroad, the area been presented by different sources as being a principle island of the Empire, a conquest and colony, a dependent country, claimed through a sort of authority, or under a feeble sovereignty (Macfarlane 1852; Hildreth 1855; Tomes and Perry 1857; Kemish 1860; Johnston 1861; Osborn 1861). Yet this indeterminacy in the relation between Yezo and Japan’s “three main islands” was not restricted to foreign observers, for it also served to characterize Japan’s relations with the territory over a long period.

The demarcation of the Yezo region noted in the previous section did not define relations between Yezo and the rest of Japan. Throughout the Tokugawa period, this amorphous barbarian space joined not only the Ryukyus and Korea, but other fantastical locations, such as Rasetsukoku or the Isle of Women, in representing what was beyond Japan’s boundaries, and maps published in Japan continued to circulate an image of the ezochi as “enframing” the territory of Japan itself well into the nineteenth century (see Figure 2, enframing is from Yonemoto 2003). This positioning of Yezo as beyond Japan’s borders reflected the manner in which, possibly from as early as 1633 and certainly in the aftermath of the Shakushain conflict, the area around Fukuyama castle served as a zone of direct control for the Matsumae while...
Yezo remained a territory in which trade would be conducted with the native inhabitants. Indeed, this divide has been seen as so central as to have been called the “completion of the sakoku system” (Kaiho 1991) because the restrictions on entering and living within the ezochi and the controlled nature of the trade resemble those measures taken with regard to other areas of foreign contact (Edmonds 1985). However, this exclusion was the product of the same connections which had led to the definition of Yezo in the first place. Understandings of the Tokugawa state as emerging through connections beyond its borders have defined its history over the last thirty years, and attention paid to the “Japanocentric World Order” (Arano Yasunori’s phrase to describe Japan’s utilization of a China-derived ka-i/civilized-barbarian order, see Arano 2005) has shown how ezo territory could be perceived as simultaneously outside Japan while also forming one of the Tokugawa Shogunate’s familiar foreigners. While not mobilized for embassies to Edo as Korea and the Ryukyus were, the inhabitants of Yezo were similarly maintained as foreign peoples offering tribute while having their territory incorporated into this

Tokugawa tributary order.

In practice, the Matsumae’s mapping of the territory mirrored the manner in which they considered it as under their authority, despite the policy of residential separation. At the outbreak of the Kunashiri-Menashi Revolt in 1789, the Matsumae noted that “the savages resident at a place called Kunashiri within our lands of the ezochi” had revolted (“Kansei Ezoran torishirabe Nikki” quoted in Emori 2007: 270). Bakufu acceptance of the Matsumae’s definition of its territorial authority shown on the kuniezu maps served as a means of acquiescing in such an understanding, reflecting that “Matsumae and the ezo forms one land.” In the same manner as Daniel Clayton has noted for Vancouver Island, where “native space was reproduced as an absolute space of British sovereignty” (Clayton 2000: 236), the space of the ezo came to be reproduced as the territorial domain of the Matsumae, and consequently of Japan. Yet the savage and wild nature of that space always left open the question of what the state’s authority was. In works like Arai Hakuseki’s Ezoshi of 1718, there is a slippage between the character of the inhabitants of the territory

Figure 2. Yezo serving to ‘enframe’ Japan well into the nineteenth century.

*Dai Nihon Yochi Zenzu* [Outline map of Greater Japan], from Yamazaki Giko’s *Dai Nihon Yochi Benran*, 1834. Courtesy of the C. V. Starr East Asian Library, University of California, Berkeley.
and the territory itself. The wild nature of both land and people are reducible to one another and used as a contrast with the ordered realm of the Tokugawa state. Early calls to bring Yezo more firmly within the Tokugawa order hinged precisely upon this issue, as accounts of exploration like Namikawa Tenmin’s *Hekiyoroku* and Sakakura Genjiro’s *Hokkai Zuihitsu* sought the opening of the *ezo-chi* to exploit its land, specifically through agriculture. This is part of a well-documented concern to increase the output and area of land under cultivation, but is also connected to the presentation of the land and peoples of the territory as wild. Such an ambiguity extended to the final state mapping project of the Tokugawa era, completed in 1838. The map of Yezo ultimately produced through this project finally succeeded in representing the area of Yezo to the same visual standards as other regions of Japan, and utilized the contracted borders that had been demarcated as a result of competition with Russia, yet remained unable to clearly indicate whether the region was commensurable with the rest of Japan.

While the map of Tokugawa Japan is presented as a fixed cartography of rule, this remains a form of tunnel vision “scripted and endorsed” by the imperial state itself (Stoler 2009: 41). The fact is that none of the ways in which Yezo could be, and was, represented, as being beyond the boundaries of sakoku Japan, incorporated within its tributary order, or as part of Japan’s territory, was dependent on formal institutionalization from the center. That all of these understandings were possible for contemporaries as well as posterity is aided by the very lack of institutional concern demonstrated by the Tokugawa state in the region. This disinterest is ultimately why the same territory can be viewed simultaneously as being both inside and outside Japan across the entire span of Tokugawa rule (Walker 2001: 39–43). While such disinterest may go against our perception of high imperialism in the era of classical imperial competition in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, it is worth recalling that the British had, in one view at least, “conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind” (Seeley 1888: 12, see also Porter 2004). The notion of an imperial formation is utilized precisely to show how empires could form, exist and shift in the absence of a consistent or unified ideological basis.

**Practicing Empire**

The Sapporo Agricultural College was founded in 1875 in order to teach those sciences held to be crucial to the development of the modern state. By 1891, these included the science of Colonial Policy, the first course on colonialism offered by a Japanese institute of higher education, and one which preceded the conventional date given for the start of Japanese colonial expansion by four years. This was taught by Sato Shosuke, who just over fifteen years later, of course, would be penning the Hokkaido section of *Fifty Years of New Japan* with which we began this article. The major influence upon this course is instructive, for although making reference to more recent developments, it was largely based upon the lectures of Herman Merivale from 1841. Merivale was very specific on what he considered a colony11 and this appears largely to have been the definition shared by Sato himself, of a sort of rugged agricultural colonization of largely empty territory thought to be particularly apt given the situation in Hokkaido at the time, and traceable back to Tokugawa calls to “Opening the land.” The difference was that now this opening would be facilitated by a central government organization, and backed by the practices undertaken by its agents and shaped by its framework, in which this course on Colonial Policy was surely to play a central role.

In terms of land itself, of mapping territories into the Japanese Empire, the cartographic production undertaken by the *kaitakushi* was of obvious significance in other areas of the Empire. While areas of Japan already under cultivation underwent a Land Tax Reform during the years 1873–1881, the surveying of these newly opened lands of Hokkaido provided not only the techniques, but also the pattern of institutional arrangements that would subsequently be utilized in the cadastral surveys that were later undertaken in Okinawa (1898–1903), Taiwan (1898–1905), Korea (1910–1918) and Kwantung (1914–1924) (Fedman 2012; Kobayashi 2012). While those undertaken within Japan proper relied on local officials and the inhabitants themselves, the latter surveys were all carried out by specialized staff as part of the local administration. The systematic nature of the surveys ensured that the imperial state gained a thorough knowledge of the territory over which it was to rule through the production of these commensurable representations of different parts the empire. As a result, such territory was made legible, allowing it to be incorporated and mobilized within the framework utilized by the empire in order to know its territory.

Yet the opening of territory demonstrated by this extension of cadastral surveys throughout newly acquired lands was not one dependent upon a static view of territory itself. This change should not be characterized by the notion of calculation *per se* (Elden 2013), in that all forms of extraction relating to territory are a matter of
calculation for the state, of resources like tax and manpower. However, mapping "territory with what comes with it" (Wood and Fels 1992: 10) does change to reflect shifts in the latter concept. For example, as a consequence of its growing recognition of the importance of mineral resources in the face of Western pressure, already by the early 1860s two American mineralogists had been employed and dispatched to Hakodate in order to assess mineral resources in the region, establishing a School of Mines and Applied Science in order to teach geology and mining to a cadre of Japanese students. This was established in the town from which the state administered Yezo because it was possible for this new method of seeing territory and opening up the land to occur in relative isolation from the rest of the state. The same strategy was essentially adopted by the Meiji state, with the geological surveys of Munroe and Lyman of Yesso occurring far in advance of those of Japan proper. Despite the administrative vagaries occurring during the period mentioned above, on maps, both geological and otherwise, this notion of Yezo retained a territorial unity under which those characteristics that "came with" this territory were able to be enumerated for the state (Figure 3).

This enumeration of characteristics 'coming with' the territory was also shown by the Japan Statistical Yearbook. The first edition, published in 1882 regarding the previous year, Meiji 14, saw its last chapter on Hokkaido, where it formed essentially a miniature version of the yearbook as a whole while also having its data incorporated into that on the rest of the state. This largely continued until the 1895 (M28) edition, where Taiwan was granted a chapter in the final section, together with one on Hokkaido. The level of detail on Hokkaido here was much greater than that on Taiwan, as we might expect given the island had only just been incorporated into the Empire. By the time the edition on 1905 (M38) appears, following the completion of the cadastral survey noted above, along with various other surveys initiated by the colonial government, this has reversed dramatically, with the chapter on Hokkaido consisting of 9 pages and that on Taiwan of 54. Subsequent editions reflect the continuing expansion of the Japanese empire, with that of 1908 seeing the addition of a tiny 2-page chapter on Karafuto while the one of 1911, the first year of Taisho,

Figure 3. The changing character of territory.
concludes with separate chapters on Hokkaido, Chosen, Taiwan, Karafuto and Kanto in that order. In the first year of Showa, 1926, the territories of Chosen, Taiwan, Karafuto, Kanto, Nanyo and supplemented by Hokkaido have been combined together within one chapter, and two years later the separate enunciation of these territories disappears from the yearbook.

The impression is of the expansion of the Japanese empire, followed by the (desire for a) process of homogenization obviating the need for the separate descriptions provided for different territories of the empire. Yet such an impression was never consistent across all aspects of imperial policy: for example, the first specific definition of the gaichi, defined in the Coordination Law (kyotsuho) of 1918 as Korea and Taiwan, placed both Hokkaido and (specifically) Karafuto within the legal naichi, while the constitution did not itself apply in Kwantung or, later, the Nanyo. Despite these apparent contradictions, all of these areas of Japan’s imperial formation found themselves mapped into the state to the same commensurable standards. These contradictory patterns of assimilation and differentiation reflect what we have already seen of Japan’s own early modern era, but actually reflect issues fundamental to the notion of empire itself. That empires are defined by heterogeneity within an imperial whole guarantees the presence of this tension. What is significant in this period is not that it was present within the Japanese empire, as it was within all others, but how this tension resolved itself along the twin axes of population and territory. “Governed differently” came to be a necessary criteria for the incorporation of native peoples within the state, in a manner which maintained certain cultural distinctions, using them to justify ongoing political and judicial discrimination while ignoring any preexisting patterns of land usage in mapping territory into the empire. The concern with “native policy,” highlighted by Takakura Shinichiro regarding the Ainu and characteristic of the recent re-attention granted the Japanese Empire as a whole, works to naturalize the manner in which these territories were mobilized within Japan’s imperial formation, serving to conceal the fact that they had to be mapped into the state.

Conclusion—Practicing Imperial Territory

Recent research on both imperial ideologies and practices has followed in the footsteps of Imperial administrators and policy-makers in endeavoring to position Japan’s colonial policies within the context of a worldwide expansion of Imperial rule (Nishiyama 2015). This study of high imperialism is, like the practices the latter espoused, a self-consciously comparative endeavor. Thanks to such studies, we have a much better understanding of what underpinned this era of high imperialism in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, characterized by the entry of newly-centralized states such as Germany and the United States, as well as Japan itself, into the competitive land grab of the period (Darwin 2007; Maier 2009; Belich 2011). However, to solely focus upon land formally grabbed within this era of explicit imperial competition is to miss the connections of this period with early modern imperial formations. While these connections have come to be explored in the cases of other empires, under the rubric of the ‘imperial turn,’ the history of the word adopted for empire (teikoku) has proved a barrier for undertaking similar research in the case of Japan.

Solley focusing upon the notion of early modern Japan as a form of proto-nation encourages an interpretation in which the expansion of a post-Meiji Japanese Empire was primarily driven by the international system into which it was socialized, and with the demise of this period of inter-imperial competition Japan has retreated to its natural national borders. This also serves to create the notion of empire as being one defined by similarity, of all modern imperial ideologies as essentially the same. Yet the history of early modern Yezō and the manner it was mapped point to the gap existing between empire as culture rather than practice. As the notion of sakoku indicated, Tokugawa Japan appears to lack the expansionist ideologies associated with other Eurasian empires of the period, yet over the course of two centuries succeeded in having the territory of Yezō incorporated into its boundaries. The success of this incorporation is indicated by the fact that it remains little contested today.

The territory of Yezō was defined as the land inhabited by the ezo. This does not mean that this territory was homogeneous, that it existed a priori, or that the state’s claims to authority were consistent across its expanse. However, it was a territory brought into being by certain practices and delimited and maintained by others. These practices changed and were adapted over time but nevertheless continued to act upon the territory. Some of these practices directly involved the central authority in Edo, such as the request for maps of territory, while some, such as the presentation of tribute by Ainu to the Matsumae, involved nested patterns of rule, whilst others, the commercial exploitation of lumber and marine life throughout the territory, were kept discrete from sources of authority. Yet this intense variety of practices, con-
stantly shifting in response to contingency, served to form the state-effect, providing the fiction of a coordinating entity from which authority flowed, the state (Mitchell 1991). Through this same variety of practices legitimated, authorized or supported by this state, the land of the *ezo* was granted its fictitious unity under the authority of the state, and represented on the map. The territory on the map provided the visual, graphic representation of the demarcation of authority of the state that authorized the practice of its own mapping. In this way, the state mapped itself into Hokkaido.

Comprehending the mapping of a state in history must involve more than merely accepting that the state itself hides a multiplicity of institutions, forms and discourses and makes them one, for it must also be aware of the nature of a map itself, and its tendency to mirror the state in its ability to impose homogeneity on disparate elements (Gaddis 2002). It is perhaps in this disjuncture between multiplicity and homogeneity that we should review the supposed contrast between the empires of the past and the nation-states of the present. From this perspective too, the division between the early modern and modern eras is far less significant than is frequently assumed.

**Acknowledgements**

With thanks to Akiko Kajiya of the Northern Studies Collection at Hokkaido University Library and to Deborah Rudolph of the C. V. Starr East Asian Library at the University of California, Berkeley for their help in procuring the maps. Thanks also to Jonathan Bull of Hokkaido University for reading and commenting upon an earlier version of this piece.

**Notes**

1. The Japanese version had been published the previous year.
2. A variant of ‘Sakhalin’ (Karafuto) used in this text.
3. The leased territory, *Kanto-shu*—a variant of ‘Sakhalin’ (Karafuto) used in this text—was granted its fictitious unity under the authority of the state, and represented on the map. The territory on the map provided the visual, graphic representation of the demarcation of authority of the state that authorized the practice of its own mapping. In this way, the state mapped itself into Hokkaido.

4. High Imperialism refers to the period of sustained imperial competition occurring in the latter half of the nineteenth century and ended with the outbreak of the First World War, characterized by the existence of a formal ideology of imperial competition, see for instance Hobshaw (1992).
5. When present at all, it was generally as *tenshi no aru kuni*, see entries in the early volumes of Matsui (1996). As Hirakawa has noted, it was not used in Chinese but by the late-eighteenth century had come to serve as the Japanese translation for *keizer-dom* in Dutch, referring to the Holy Roman Empire. He specifically notes Tsuki Masatsuna’s *Taiseyoshizutsu* of 1789; Hirakawa 2008: 127–129. It seems its prior connection with a European political form and lack of connotations relating to China was why it was adopted as the name of the Meiji state; a detailed study of this issue would be most welcome.
6. This is much simpler in the case of the Qing as this was designation under which they signed the 1895 Treaty ending the Sino-Japanese war, which is projected backwards into the Qing’s own history. References to a *Min-teikoku* and *Chuka Teikoku*, on the other hand, are entirely anachronistic but becoming more common, following the trend elsewhere as references to Tang or Qing ‘dynasties’ become superseded by ‘empires.’ By contrast, in this respect the Meiji Restoration still serves as an absolute break between the early modern and modern eras in Japan’s own history.
7. For the remainder of this essay, Yezo will be utilized when referring to the territory of the region and *ezo* when referring to the population. The term is obviously pejorative today but reflects contemporary usage.
8. Hence the use of the character associated with ‘eastern barbarians’ to write the term Ezo, the character referring to ‘northern barbarians’ was also used during the Tokugawa period.
9. Ryukyu provides another exception, but not only did the Ryukyus possess agricultural production that could be represented in a manner commensurable, although not identical, with other regions in Japan, its mapping was conducted by the Shimazu family as one of the four *kuni* under their control. The Matsumae possessed no territory within the area traditionally incorporated by representations of *ritsuryo* geography.
10. As was consistently recognized on the maps themselves, with both the Genroku and Tenpo *kuniezu* noting the area as “Matumae-shima [islands].”
11. “By a Colony I understand a territory of which the soil is entirely or principally owned by settlers from the mother country” (Merivale 1841: vi).

**References**


(JE)


Tokyo: Heibonsha. (J)


(J) written in Japanese

(JE) written in Japanese with English abstract