Modern Mapping Process of East Asian Countries: From Imperial Cartography to National Survey

An Editor’s Note

KOBAYASHI Shigeru
Professor Emeritus of Osaka University, Osaka University of Tourism

Concerning the history of cartography in East Asia, most researchers have been concentrating their attention on traditional maps, which represent people’s cognition of landscapes as well as the world views nurtured in their societies before the diffusion of modern mapping. In this area, under the influence of a long tradition of Chinese cartography, adjacent countries such as Korea and Japan developed their own style of mapmaking. From the viewpoint of the history of science, researchers examined specific categories of maps, such as world maps, and tried to elucidate their changing relations in order to approach the process of the transfer of spatial knowledge (Sivin and Ledyard 1994).

On the other hand, most of the modern mapping in East Asia, the focus of this collection of papers, is beyond these researchers’ vision. They have been interested only in the exploration and extension of mapped areas up to the middle of the 19th century as an important process of the history of geography. The other processes of modern mapping, such as the hydrographical works of Western surveyors in the early stage of mapmaking and the activities of mapmaking institutions established subsequently by governments in the modern era, have been ignored because they seem to have been carried out as routine works by surveying organizations and followed a fixed pattern.

However, recent progress in the study of colonial cartography in South Asia has revealed that even the application of modern mapping by British colonial governments was not always uniform and progressive during the 19th century. Modern surveying, including triangulation, was applied systematically in India (Edney 1997), whereas this kind of method was not used in Ceylon (Barrow 2003). In the case of East Asia also, a brief survey of cartographies in Western countries’ colonies and those of Japan reveals considerable variation as well as common features among them (Kobayashi 2012).

Of course, these processes have been already described to a varying extent in the national histories of cartography of the countries concerned, such as Zhongguo ce hui shi (“Zhongguo ce hui shi” bian ji wei yuan hui 1995), Chizu Sokuryō Hyakunen Shi (“Chizu Sokuryō Hyakunen Shi” Henshū linkai 1970), and Nihon Suiro Shi (Kaijō Hoan-chō Suiro-bu 1971). However, it should be pointed out that the visions of these national histories are limited to the mapping of the territories of the respective countries and their processes are narrated from a progressive viewpoint. In order to examine the survey process of the improvement of nautical charts, for example, we have to enlarge our field of vision to cover not only East Asia, but also the relation between the hydrographic institutions of various countries. The international exchange of hydrographic information developed also in relation to East Asia from the early stage of modern mapping.
Complex interactions between traditional and modern cartographies found in these processes should be scrutinized, taking into account the relevant international context.

In this collection of papers, we divide the subject into three categories according to their chronological order. The first is the modern mapmaking by Western countries since the end of the 18th century. Surveys of the East Asian coast were repeatedly conducted by Western ships, and sometimes they were extended into inland areas by force of arms. The second is colonial cartography, which followed the mapmaking of the early stage. Along with Western countries, Japan also played an active part in this kind of mapmaking, even though it was native to this region. Colonial governments of these countries extended mapping for the administration of the areas concerned. The third is the supply of modern maps by national institutions. Hand in hand with the formation of governments in the modern era, varied maps, such as cadastral maps, topographical maps, and nautical charts, were prepared for administrative, military, and civilian use. In addition to the establishment of an organizational system, the transfer of modern cartographical technology was a prerequisite for the functioning of government.

The first paper, entitled “Imperial cartography in East Asia from the late 18th to the early 20th century” prepared by Shigeru Kobayashi, is an overview of the process of Western mapping in this region. It follows the escalation of map and chart making since the sending of the British embassy, led by George Macartney, to China in 1793. Several types of mapping by Western countries their agents are reviewed chronologically. It mentions also the imperial mapping of Japan from the 1870s as that of a late starter.

The second paper is entitled “Imperial mapping during the Arrow War: Its process and repercussions on the cartography in China and Japan.” Written by Kunitada Narumi and Shigeru Kobayashi, it examines the relation between the Arrow War and the mapping of strategic areas of China from 1858 to 1860. It focuses on the close cooperation of Western diplomats and military personnel and a wartime survey by British and French soldiers. In addition, it scrutinizes the translation of Western imperial maps of China in China and Japan. A stark contrast is found between these adjacent countries.

The paper by Daiju Koseki, entitled “Japanese cadastral mapping in an East Asian perspective, 1872–1915,” follows the trials and errors encountered in the Japanese cadastral survey and describe the main features of four kinds of maps prepared in this process. It is remarkable that the experience of this process reflected on the systematic cadastral survey in the Japanese colonies.

The authors hope that this collection of papers will provide a basis for the advancement of study concerning the modern mapping of East Asia as a first step to creating new frameworks of understanding. At the same time, they hope these papers will promote international exchange of information and opinions concerning the modern mapping of East Asia among researchers who are interested in this field.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the other three papers to be contributed were not included in this issue. Most regrettable was the sudden death of ex-Professor Li Ming Hsia of National Taitung University in January 2015, who was preparing a paper contrasting the style of Chinese and Western maps of the eastern part of Taiwan during the 19th century. His paper on the geographic imagination of Taiwan (Hsia and Yorgason 2008) provides suggestions on this theme.

We hope that Katsunori Kawamura’s paper about the nautical cartography of Japan in the latter half of the 19th century and Chun-Lin Kuo’s paper on the military mapping of Taiwan during WWII will appear in journals of geography soon.
References


