

## **A Malleable Map: Geographies of Restoration in Central Japan, 1600-1912**

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Peter Kornicki

Since the late 19th century Japan has been in a constant state of geographical flux that shows no sign of abating even today. This process started shortly after the Meiji Restoration of 1868 but was given greater impetus when, in 1888–9, a massive reorganization of geographical names and nomenclature was undertaken which reduced the number of cities, towns and villages in Japan from over 71,000 to just under 16,000. By 1961 they had been reduced still further to just over 3,400, and now in 2011 there are fewer than 2,000, as small communities are perpetually seeking to amalgamate with neighbours to move up the hierarchical ladder of administrative units. Of late the government has been encouraging mergers between neighbouring communities in the name of administrative efficiency, and there are undeniable advantages in terms of fiscal independence that accrue from moving up that hierarchy of place from ‘village’ to ‘town’ and from ‘town’ to ‘city’. This process has had some curious results. For example, the entire mountainous island of Tsushima, which is 60 kilometres long and lies between Korea and Japan, became in 2004 a ‘city’ when six towns, which themselves were the product of previous mergers, amalgamated; it is, however, a city with a falling population, now fewer than 34,000 and a city scattered in the form mostly of small settlements over an area of some 700 square kilometres. This process that has produced such odd results has much to tell us about hierarchies of place and local attachment in Japanese history and it is this process in its earlier phases that Kären Wigen explores in this book, and in particular its articulation in maps, statistics and journalism.

Local history in Japan is a thriving field of enquiry, supported by well-equipped and abundant archives and interested local citizenry, and it produces prodigious amounts of print, including local historical journals and prestige publications: most villages, towns and cities have seen fit to commission elaborate histories,

naturally imposing current boundaries on an uncomplaining past, however anachronistic this may seem to purists. As a result Wigen has a wealth of material to draw upon, but this brings with it its own problems, which she is by no means unaware of. One of the problems is that local narratives predominate and larger themes, particularly those that affect the whole of Japan or large swathes of it, are obscured, and another is that local pride and loyalties wax strong. The area that Wigen focuses her book upon is that covered today by what is known as Nagano Prefecture (Nagano-ken) in central Japan: since the 8th century most of this area had been known as Shinano Province (Shinano no kuni) and, like all provinces, it had enjoyed an alternative name, Shinsh?, which combined the first character of the provincial name (here Shin) with a term from Chinese geographical nomenclature, *zhou* or in Japanese pronunciation *sh?*. In 1871, however, the old *kuni* or provinces were abolished, and Shinano was replaced by two prefectures names Nagano and Chikuma, but many of the changes made in 1871 were unstable and in 1876 Nagano and Chikuma prefectures were amalgamated under the name of Nagano.

What is striking, however, is that the old term Shinsh? is still in widespread use (for example in domestic tourism), unlike the variant forms for any of the old provincial names. This of course raises the obvious question of just how typical or representative Shinsh?, or rather Nagano Prefecture, can be said to be. Wigen addresses this problem here and there (pp. 54, 69, 139, 230, etc), admitting that Shinsh? was 'peculiar' in lying mid-way between Kyoto and Edo, 'anomalous' in that it was 'a patchwork of separate valleys', and in the Meiji period unusual both in that the new prefectural boundaries coincided closely with those of the old province and in that it was economically successful as a result of its silk-reeling industry. It is reassuring that she identifies for us the factors that distinguish Shinsh? from other provinces rather than leaving the reader to wonder how representative it might be. The nagging question remains, however, and the reader has to be aware that, rather than trying to replicate her geographical research in various regions of Japan, Wigen has chosen instead to question how geographical consciousness was articulated not only in maps but also in statistics, textbooks and journalism and thus to furnish a much deeper perspective while keeping an eye on the national picture. Others, through careful examination of different parts of Japan, will have to have the last word on this question, but Wigen provides enough to reassure the reader that most of the phenomena she describes were by no means limited to Shinsh?.

The first part of the book considers maps and the representation of space in Japan between 1600 (the start of the Edo period) and 1912 (the end of the Meiji period). The important point Wigen makes here is that there was a major disjuncture between the boundaries of political space and the representation of geographical space in the Edo period. Detailed maps of Japan were compiled on the orders of the shogun in the early 17th century and these later formed the basis for a profusion of commercially published maps, which showed individual cities, provinces, regions or the whole of Japan. However, the complicated political map of Japan during the Edo period, when land was under the control either of the shogun or of the several hundred landed daimyo, no longer bore any relation whatsoever to the ancient provincial boundaries, and no attempt was made to rectify geography in conformity with the political realities. Thus maps, geographical description and even personal addresses remained loyal to the ancient provinces, but jurisdiction, administration and taxation followed quite different boundaries. As Wigen rightly points out, this disjuncture has been ignored, as also has the 'continuing career of the *kuni* in a modernizing Japan' (p. 17). Although the great mapmaker In? Tadataka (1745–1818) applied mathematical surveying techniques to his maps and imposed lines of latitude and longitude on the map of Japan, ignoring the boundaries of the *kuni*, they were not expunged from maps so easily. The administrative upheaval of 1871 is known in Japanese as *haihan chiken*, a term that means 'the abolition of the domains and the establishment of prefectures': this, as Wigen is quite right to emphasize, makes no mention of abolishing the provinces but speaks only of abolishing the domains that had belonged to the daimyo. In fact, the provinces did indeed have a 'continuing career', being frequently shown in maps and other forms of geographical representation long after the provinces had officially been abolished in favour of prefectures, and it is to Wigen's credit that she has recognised this and sought to tease out its importance.

In the second part of the book Wigen turns her attention to the compilation of statistics, geographical instruction in schools and the rise of the provincial press. Although 'The poetry of statistics' as a chapter

title carries metaphor a little far, Wigen's account of the vicissitudes of the Meiji state's efforts to develop statistical tools for measuring economic activity throughout Japan is rewarding and revealing. In spite of the administrative changes of 1871 the old place-names lingered in the statistics, just as they did in the maps, right up to the 1890s. Wigen argues, and she has good evidence for doing so, that although the criteria were set in Tokyo and the aim was to serve perceived national needs, the presentation of the data continued to serve local needs and to sustain local identities. Much the same can be said of the teaching of geography in schools: in 1878 the national government ordered that schools teach not only the geography of the world and of Japan but also that of the local prefecture, presumably in an attempt to inculcate identification with the geographical divisions instituted in 1871. This new need was met, in Shinshū and elsewhere, by textbooks that increasingly celebrated the geographical particularities of the prefecture in which they were to be used, including monuments such as castles as well as physical features such as mountains and lakes. Perhaps, though, the richest source for Wigen's purpose is the press: while national dailies were founded in Tokyo in the 1870s local dailies and weeklies were not far behind and so long as railways were slow to penetrate rural areas it was local newspapers that had the upper hand. Wigen cites data suggesting that once the railway had reached the town of Ueda Tokyo newspapers were selling three copies for every copy of a local newspaper, but that was not until 1895. One of the main newspapers was the *Shinano Daily News*, the name of which reflected the attachment to the old provincial name, and under the editorship of Yamaji Aizan (1865–1917), a Christian writer from Tokyo, it carried a succession of articles and features celebrating famous sons of Shinshū, local history, and so on, in addition to economic and political news of purely local interest. The strength of these local attachments is apparent from the fact that in 1904, when Tokyo newspapers were easily available, 18,000 copies of the *Shinano Daily News* were being sold every day.

There are a few details to quibble about. Firstly, the *nengō* were not 'imperial reign names' (p. 62) as their equivalents were in China, for in Japan they were not coterminous with reigns; this minor error draws attention to the whole issue of the measurement of time, which also assumed new forms in the Meiji period when the *nengō* very definitely became 'imperial reign names'. Secondly, the cartouches on Japanese maps were not called *murakata* nor is their shape anything but an accidental reminder of the shape of Japan gold coins (p. 73): cartouches of this shape have been the norm in East Asia at least since the Mawangdui maps of the western Han dynasty in China, and the word *murakata* is simply part of the legend and indicates that cartouches of this shape on this particular map contain the names of villages. Thirdly, I am hesitant to agree with Wigen in her suggestion that the findings of Thongchai Winichakul in his book *Siam mapped* do not apply to Japan (p. 124): this is because Wigen restricts her consideration to the domestic boundaries of Japan, between *kuni* and *kuni*, while the 'international' boundaries, if that is even the right way of describing them, were indeed fuzzy and contested, particularly in the north and the south.

Wigen's narrative brings to light and historicises a feature of modern Japan that many are aware of but few have explored. Every municipal library in Japan has a section devoted to *ky?do shiry?*, an expression that may be rendered 'materials relating to our native place' and is more emotional than exact, and, as mentioned above, most villages, towns and cities now boast their own multivolume histories. Lurking behind this local pride is a strong awareness of ancient geographies: *Shinsh?* may be unusually prominent even today, but the formal names of other provinces, such as Satsuma, Kii and Kaga, are often encountered in the names of local shops and enterprises, in advertising copy and in materials for domestic tourists. Among the reasons Wigen puts forward one is particularly arresting. Her argument is that those committed to building up the Japanese nation state, Yamaji Aizan included, were acutely aware of the question of scale – in other words, of the need for national identity and loyalty to be built upon foundations of local identities and loyalties. In essence she is arguing that for all the apparent radicalism implicit in the changes encapsulated in *haihan chiken*, in practice it was only the domains that were abolished and, once the new prefectural boundaries in most cases moved closer to the old provincial boundaries, local loyalties were far from discouraged and were instead used as the foundation of a sense of the nation. This is a persuasive argument but it needs to be weighed up against the other measures and systems that tended to obliterate local differences – a national system of banknotes, a national conscript army, and a uniform national legal system – and it would benefit from comparison with other societies that sought to create a nation out of a population used to local loyalties, particularly German and Italy but perhaps also India.

The author is happy with this review and does not wish to respond.

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