

## 21 • Concluding Remarks

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The chapters assembled here, together with those in the first book of this volume, present what we believe is the most extensive survey of traditional Asian cartography ever attempted. In this conclusion we draw together some of the themes that have emerged in our consideration of the cartographies of China, Japan, Korea, Greater Tibet, Vietnam, and the rest of Southeast Asia. As such, it complements the conclusion to volume 2, book 1, which covered Islamic and South Asian cartography. The work here represents a major effort toward righting an imbalance in previous accounts of the history of cartography, an imbalance usually tilted toward the achievements of Mediterranean and western Europe. When they were dealt with in the past, which was not often, the cartographies surveyed here tended to be relegated to short chapters in more comprehensive histories of European cartography, either as afterthoughts at the end of such works or at the beginning where they could somehow be identified with prehistoric cartography as forming the “primitive” origins of an ever improving scientific map. Their artifacts have thus often been treated as curiosities and exotica, to be included in general histories of cartography only as antiquarian diversions. Indeed, from a Western perspective all Asian maps are by definition “exotic.”

There is also no shortage of curiosities: divinatory maps on pig livers, maps carved as charms on bamboo poles, a relief model with streams flowing with mercury in a tomb guarded by crossbow booby traps. But beyond such artifacts, the chapters in this book have shown that the cultures outside the European sphere of influence have rich cartographic traditions of their own. In a number of cases, the non-Western histories of cartography are as long as, and perhaps even longer than, those of Europe. Of the East and Southeast Asian cartographies, those of China and Japan have been the most studied. The scarcity of literature on the traditional cartographies of Southeast Asia and Tibet has fostered the impression that the Chinese tradition was dominant. But as has been amply illustrated here, the notion that non-Chinese cartography in East and Southeast Asia was generally linked to that of the “Middle Kingdom” needs to be qualified. Chinese culture may have been a powerful influence in the region,

but the surrounding cultures were not passive recipients. The cultures on the receiving end sometimes disagreed with the Chinese on what was significant in Chinese culture. For example, the *Shanhai jing* (Classic of mountains and seas) exerted greater influence on Korean mapmaking and geographic consciousness than it did on the Chinese tradition, at least what survives. A similar situation occurs with Islamic cartography. It seems to have been preserved in China only long enough to be transmitted to Korea, where it exerted a greater influence. Likewise, Buddhist cosmography had a more profound effect on the Japanese mapmaking tradition than on the Chinese, though Buddhism made its way to Japan through China and Korea.

Although the cartographic histories explored here rival those of the West in length and variety, they have not been presented as fully as the history of cartography in the West was in volume 1 and will be in volumes 3–6. One reason for this—as several authors in this book have noted—is that the study of non-European cartography is still only in its formative phase, even though it has gone on for more than half a century. For some time spans, such as the Tang in China, material is scant; for others, such as the Qing, the material is so vast that it has yet to be cataloged and assessed. Where artifacts are few, it might be possible to learn about maps from textual sources; but in a number of instances understanding is impeded by the lack of a word that corresponds to “map.” Thus, as happened in other parts of this project, discontinuities in the record hamper attempts to construct a history.

In addition, as has been emphasized elsewhere in this work, the social contexts of mapping and mapmaking are just beginning to be understood. As in Europe, the Islamic world, and South Asia, those who made maps in the cultures surveyed here were generally members of intellectual elites. With the possible exception of Burma in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there were no professional or specialist mapmakers. Those who made maps were often scholars striving for breadth of knowledge. They can be called cartographers, geographers, or astronomers only if one remembers that their activities crossed the disciplinary boundaries implied by those terms in their modern usages. Mapmaking impinged upon

art, literature, science, religion, divination, magic, philosophy, and politics. The form and content of map images varied with their varying purposes. Not until relatively late in history did mapmakers in these cultures feel an allegiance to the canon of rationality and mathematical accuracy that characterizes the enterprise today.

### EUROPEAN AND ASIAN CARTOGRAPHIES COMPARED

This summary of East and Southeast Asian cartographic histories has so far offered a number of parallels with the history of the map in Europe. If these histories do parallel those of Europe, one might well ask whether their separation from the European history told in other volumes is justified: Why even make a distinction between the cartographic histories of Asia and Europe? It is possible—but not, in our view, justified—to conceive of the cartographies of the West and East as converging toward the goal of ever increasing verisimilitude and accuracy. The argument goes that nonspecialist forms of cartography were displaced by a specialist form deriving from the techniques of applied geometry advocated most influentially by Claudius Ptolemy. This was one of the results of contact with Europeans. In Europe too one might claim under the “convergent view” that the nonmathematical cartographies practiced during the Middle Ages were also displaced after the rediscovery of Ptolemy during the Renaissance. And, as during the Middle Ages, one could point out the development of mathematical techniques in China, Japan, and Korea that could serve as a foundation for adoption of Ptolemaic techniques. Even before the Europeans introduced Ptolemaic cartography into Asia, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean mapmakers had produced maps impressive for their mathematical accuracy.

The result of this convergent history is an approach to a worldwide practice of cartography that was specialized in two senses: executed by practitioners with training in techniques specific to mapmaking, and reflecting a sharper division between maps and other forms of representing space graphically. It makes less sense to speak of cultural or national styles of mapmaking today than to speak of such styles with regard to painting and calligraphy. Map readers of different cultural backgrounds can, without difficulty, recognize maps made today as such no matter the country of origin, though legends in different scripts may still offer resistance to reading. This may not have been true in the past, if the slow progress of cartographic Westernization is any indication.

The convergent view of cartographic history makes sense only if one accepts two propositions: first, that cartographic practice across most cultures was striving for today’s mathematical cartography as its end; second,

that the Western introduction of Ptolemaic techniques into Asia only accelerated that development. In opposition to this view, however, the research undertaken for this project has gathered compelling evidence that mapmakers in East and Southeast Asian cultures were not aiming to establish a mathematical art. This is particularly true of mapmakers in Southeast Asia and Greater Tibet, and generally true of mapmakers in China, Japan, and Korea. East Asian mapmakers in many cases had available to them some early statements on the usefulness of measured mapping and measurements from topographic surveys. They possessed the means to produce remarkable maps of large areas like the *Yu ji tu* (Map of the tracks of Yu, 1136). They also had developed the astronomical instruments that would have allowed them to make maps using projections and coordinate systems. A need for these technical features of Ptolemaic cartography never arose, however, because none of the cultures studied here conceived of the earth as spherical or, more precisely, found it necessary to do so. Looking at the mathematical techniques and instrumentation alone, one might be tempted to conclude that East Asian mapmakers had independently arrived one step away from modern cartography. But despite the availability of a variety of mathematical and mensurational technology, they often chose not to represent the measurements in the form of scale maps. Because such mapmakers were often members of well-educated elites, this inconsistency cannot be attributed to an imperfect understanding of mapmaking, much less to a lack of skill or to backwardness. It resulted from dedication to the written text as the primary authority for communication.

With the possible exception of East Asian astronomical mapping, what the examples of the Asian cartographies explored here suggest instead is that the history of European cartography does not necessarily provide the ideal model of the map. It does not seem proper to speak of a “normal” pattern of cartographic development in terms of a movement from pictures to hybrid picture maps to the modern mathematical map. Even if we recognize that certain classes of maps—such as topographic maps, often thought to represent the pinnacle of objectivity—have become more alike across the world in the twentieth century, it is unwise to assume that homogeneity has resulted. Casual inspection of today’s topographic maps from various nations reveals wide differences in styles, criteria for inclusiveness of content, and approach that cannot be ignored. Indeed, a promising line of research might center on how traditional cartographies in the regions we have discussed have affected the modern “official” maps of national governments. Equally promising might be a comparison of the effect of European cartography in Asian countries that succumbed to colonial rule (including most states of Southeast Asia) with its effect

in countries that did not (in particular, China, Korea, and Japan). In the former, the indigenous cartographies were effectively suppressed, creating a disjunction that was not apparent in East Asia.

The displacement of traditional mapmaking practices by European mathematical cartography did not necessarily represent “progress.” In some respects it may have been a loss. What has been lost is an explicit and prominent human element in the cartographic image. Modern topographic maps tend to homogenize the landscape, adopting conventional signs to represent features on the earth’s surface. As a result, they often lack humanity because they are drawn not from the perspective of a single observer but from a multiplicity of viewpoints: a view from everywhere is also a view from nowhere. Moreover, the uniform planimetric perspective of modern topographic maps often masks essential aspects of the features being portrayed, whereas the use of oblique perspectives or the combination of diverse perspectives manages to highlight those same essential qualities. Typically, then, the modern map experientially distances the map reader from the world, treating it as a mathematical object. This generalizing and abstracting power is one of the strengths of cartography, but it may come at the price of dehumanizing the representation.

Maps representing large areas that produced an abstract, distancing effect were made in traditional East and Southeast Asian societies, as noted in the case of the *Yu ji tu*, and these maps have drawn much scholarly attention in the past. Far more prevalent than those maps, however, were large-scale maps of small local areas that involved the reader in the landscape. One means of fostering that involvement was variable or reverse perspective, which often required a map reader to imagine turning bodily or being in several different places in order to make the map representations conform to the way they are normally viewed. By this means the mapmaker attempted to place the reader in the landscape, where one would have to turn one’s head or body in order to view the terrain in all directions or to move about an object depicted, such as a monastery, so as to view its several sides. This sense of geographic illusion was enhanced by the traditional mapmaker’s preference for pictorial over abstract representations of topographic features. On many maps, to be sure, the pictorial representations appear stylized and follow conventions of their own, but they impart at least something of the look of the landscape.

The response of the reader was often a major concern of traditional East and Southeast Asian mapmakers. This is yet another reason that the division between map and picture is often difficult to maintain. A map not only helped store geographic information, but also evoked aesthetic and religious responses. In China, for example,

there survive texts of poems inscribed on maps that record the emotions of map readers when confronted by a cartographic image. In composite Tibetan paintings, representations of saints and deities often complement maps of the sacred places they are associated with, sometimes in a dominant position and sometimes subordinate to the cartographic component.

## MAP AND TEXT

Poetic inscriptions on maps bring out another significant aspect of much traditional Asian cartography: the textuality of geographic representation. In cartography this textuality is not limited to the typography or calligraphy of the labels on maps or the presence of cartouches. It frequently extends to a complementary relationship between word and image. Most Asian societies attached great importance to the written word. Accordingly, members of the literate elite in these societies customarily preserved quantitative data on the locations of specific places and the distances between them in written narratives. Map images served primarily to reflect the appearance of the area depicted and to show spatial relationships among topographic features or hierarchical relationships based on the relative importance or sanctity of the features depicted. In these circumstances, drawing maps to a systematic geometric scale was not as important as previous accounts have made it appear. More important for the practice of aesthetic and religious cartography was that a mapmaker have the freedom to vary scale for rhetorical emphasis and emotional impact. What are now regarded as functions of the cartographic image—the preservation of shape and distance—were shared by text and image. What would now be thought of as an atlas might in certain earlier contexts have been conceived as an illustrated book, such as the geographic compendiums described in the preceding chapters. For this reason, one can hardly evaluate the accuracy of a culture’s geographic knowledge solely on the evidence of the cartographic image. To properly assess a culture’s knowledge of geography, one must often look to a diversity of texts.

Among the East Asian literati, geographic information was often transmitted through printed media—books—rather than by direct human contact. The literate elites in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, for example, made it a point to import and read Chinese books, and they often used Chinese maps and other geographic materials in making their own maps. In compiling the *Honil kangni yöktae kukto chi to* (Map of integrated lands and regions of historical countries and capitals, 1402), Korean mapmakers relied on what were considered the best Chinese, Korean, and Japanese maps available. Similarly, when incorporating Korea into their “maps of all under heaven,” Chinese mapmakers seem to have relied on

Korean-made images. As these examples and others in the preceding chapters suggest, the mapmaker's task in East Asia was as much a bibliographical endeavor as an empirical one. Comparable examples from Southeast Asia and Greater Tibet are not known. Nevertheless, the making of maps based on the accumulation of knowledge from diverse sources was evident, as exemplified by the Nepali map of Central Asia or the map of the greater part of Asia in some versions of the Thai *Trai Phum*. Thus mapmaking largely, though not exclusively, involved reprocessing and reinterpreting source materials. It would not be an exaggeration to say that for a geographer, particularly in East Asia, to study a place meant above all to read the relevant graphic materials, not to journey there for a personal inspection.

### REPRESENTING THE PHYSICAL AND METAPHYSICAL WORLD

Understanding a place could be a matter of mensuration, but it also could be a matter of inspiration. This suggests another aspect of the geographic illusion created with multiple viewpoints. A map was made not only to convey information in the sense of facts, but also to communicate the mapmaker's experience of the land—intellectual, perceptual, and affective. From a traditional perspective, modern practice seems somewhat impoverished in these aspects.

There is yet at least one other way traditional East and Southeast Asian mapmaking exhibits a pronounced human dimension. As in European medieval mapping, cosmological inquiry often fostered cartographic development. The difference was that in Asia mapmaking did not sever its relationship with this sphere of human activity. The preceding chapters have shown how closely related were the religious and political pursuits that fostered map production; in some cases it is hard to distinguish the two. Political centers often coincided with religious centers, and these were also usually centers of map production. Maps were useful for exerting political control, as is often pointed out above. But besides serving the interests of ruling elites by providing them with information about their domains, maps had less secular purposes. They not only represented the observable world, but also modeled what was unseen: the entire cosmos including realms of spiritual beings, heavens and netherworlds, different realms of existence, and the configurations of invisible natural forces—as, for example, in siting and divination. Mapping was important not only for journeying through geographic space but also for spiritual wayfinding. As suggested in a number of chapters here and in previous volumes, the different kinds of space were often not sharply delineated. The secular was often

also sacred. Political space was often simultaneously spiritual space. Spiritual space often overlapped into architectural space, particularly in temples, tombs, and reliquaries, which themselves were often three-dimensional cosmological models. The distinction between spiritual and physical was rendered invalid.

Maps purporting to represent unobserved macrocosms—unseen levels of existence—often seem to have an abstract, geometric quality, understandably so since the awareness they are based on supposedly transcends sensory perception. Such maps—for example, Tibetan mandalas and Southeast Asian temples—are often supposed to represent purer forms of reality, less subject to the irregularity found in the material world and reflected on traditional geographic maps in East and Southeast Asia. Thus, in those areas increasing abstraction in map images did not correspond with increased knowledge of the physical world. Frequently abstraction, simplification, and regularity were qualities desirable in the representation of the immaterial, the nonworldly. Transcendent experiences, after all, were valued as ways of escaping the contingencies, the disorder, and the unpredictability of the material world. To be accurate, the representations inspired by such experiences often needed to evoke the harmony, the constancy, and the tranquillity of non-earthly realms.

In contrast, accuracy in representing the terrestrial world often meant irregularity and concreteness. True, abstract schemes like the nonary square and grid pattern do appear on images of the terrestrial world, often on maps with political purposes such as imposing or imaging order and stability. In such cases the map image may be expressing a political desire to unify the terrestrial and the celestial, the secular and the religious, just as the Chinese emperor was supposed to do. Despite this rhetorical use of maps, it seems that observation of the terrain led to different conclusions about the order of the terrestrial landscape. It was composed of heterogeneous elements, as the difficulties of maintaining territory repeatedly drove home to rulers of all cultures. This realization of and respect for the particularity of place perhaps provides another explanation for why pictorial modes of mapmaking persisted so long after the development of quantitative techniques applicable to cartography. Perhaps this attitude also helps account for why the Westernization of Asian cartography did not take place as swiftly and totally as formerly believed. The modern European geographic map was perceived as too abstract, too homogeneous, and therefore implied insufficient materiality to be a valid geographic representation. Depending on what one expects from a cartographic image, a pictorial map may be more realistic than a modern mathematical map, and vice versa. For some purposes

a heterogeneous mapping space may be more useful than a homogeneous mapping space, and vice versa. The homogeneous mapping space of modern cartography is not intrinsically better.

This last statement is not intended to slight modern cartography, but is meant as a reminder that modern cartography can still learn from what it has left behind. As a result of their human dimensions, traditional East and Southeast Asian maps leave one with an impression of the world that contrasts with that left by their modern mathematical counterparts: the world of the traditional artifacts is a vital place, one that interacts with human beings, not an inert conglomeration of physical forms. One may thus view with a sense of loss the triumph of the modern. There is little doubt that it was and continues to be a triumph in many ways. Modern cartography dazzles: it is more highly technologized, it is faster, it is more efficient, it is more accurate than premodern cartography; and it is constantly being refined. But it does not capture as broad a range of human culture and experience as traditional Asian mapping. There is something, a certain expressiveness, in the hand-drawn or hand-carved line that is inimitable by modern mechanical means of graphic reproduction. After looking at the artifacts reproduced here, one begins to understand more fully the need for an aesthetics, as well as a science, of mapmaking.

The word “begins” in the preceding sentence should be emphasized. As Laozi says in the *Dao de jing* (Classic of the way and its power), the further one goes, the less one knows. Similarly, the further this project goes, the less manageable it seems to have become, particularly in respect to the range of issues that call out for analysis and the kinds of questions that need to be answered. Thus the more we understand, the clearer it becomes that the days when one person could hope to write a comprehensive history of cartography have long since passed. This is particularly true in an age when scholars have specific disciplines, for a map is best understood and appreciated as an intersection of what are often regarded as diverse disciplines. The conclusions presented here are meant to serve merely as preliminary findings—or often, rather, as provisional hypotheses—and to suggest the importance of continuing inquiry into traditional Asian mapmaking.

The Asian stage of the History of Cartography Project may be concluding, but work in this area has to continue. Several tasks of basic scholarship remain. Collections of Asian maps need to be identified; catalogs of those collections need to be compiled; and the maps themselves need to have their contents analyzed. As these tasks are accomplished, it will become increasingly possible to draw reliable conclusions about map types and styles, subjects on which there is room for considerable refine-

ment. Also in need of development is the basic matter of consistent descriptive terminology.

## A TENTATIVE TYPOLOGY

Some regularities in dominant map function emerge from the range of artifacts described in this book. It is possible to construct a tentative typology of map functions related to the scales of human experience at which they are represented. Such a task is fraught with difficulties and pitfalls, however, for different map functions are not exclusively represented at particular scales, nor is the dominant function always clear. Rather than identify a number of map types or genres, therefore, we are offering broad categories of function as a basis for discussion. There would be great risk in putting this typology in a diagram, because it might be taken too literally and because its apparent authority might mask its limitations. Nevertheless, we provide a tentative list of functions with scales of human experience that could form the components of such a matrix as table 21.1.

The typology is made more complex by the distinction between representations of the physical and metaphysical worlds. Clearly both are equally “real” to the makers and users of these representations, so that the issue is not simply one of gradations of verisimilitude. Moreover, in many maps there is a quite natural merging from one domain to another (for example, from the cosmographical to the physical geographic) within the same representation.

Some generalizations may be made from this list. Although the cosmos is entered at the smallest scale, there is a sense in which cosmographical representations of the upper worlds or netherworlds are scaleless, even though in Buddhist cosmographies the dimensions of heavens and hells are often quite explicit.

Maps whose main function is wayfinding appear largely in the middle scales (such as provincial or regional), as do intelligence maps showing topographic information such as mountains and river systems and strategic sites such as forts and defenses. Inventory is a pervasive category that appears to be called for at many scales (shrines, landed property, towns and regional resources, countries). Divination functions, on the other hand, are often appropriate at more local scales such as in siting graves, altars, ordination halls, houses, temples, and cities. When applied to directions of auspicious or inauspicious travel or military planning the scale is more regional.

Better descriptive terminology will develop when the origins and context of the maps become clearer. Dating of artifacts is uncertain in a number of cases, since we do not understand the processes by which they were made and what conventions governed copying. An

TABLE 21.1 Tentative List of Map Functions with Scales of Human Experience

DOMINANT MAP FUNCTION (physical and metaphysical)	
Inventory	
Places	
Natural resources	
Landed property	
Wayfinding	
Navigation	
Pilgrimage	
Commerce	
Intelligence	
Topographic information	
Strategic installations	
Education	
Planning and Engineering	
Architectural	
City	
Hydrological works	
Gardens	
Administration	
Political	
Fiscal	
Commemoration	
Political influence	
Events	
Divination	
Astrology	
Siting	
Worship	
Relics	
Meditation	
Mnemonic	
SCALE OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE (small to large)	
Room	
Building	
Neighborhood	
Town	
Local administrative area (e.g., county)	
Regional administrative area (e.g., province)	
Country	
Continent	
World	
Cosmos	

improved chronology of artifacts would help us better understand the relation between specific artifacts and map types. When the artifacts are properly classified and dated, then it may be possible—in terms of aesthetic, religious, technical, or historical significance—to establish criteria for informed assessment. Writers from within the

tradition, such as Shen Kuo, made a start, but no one really followed up on their work in a serious and sustained manner.

## FUTURE NEEDS

The study of East and Southeast Asian cartography still awaits scholars with the necessary cultural sensitivity and knowledge to undertake the foundational work. Those interpreting traditional Asian maps in the future will have to broaden their knowledge in order to deepen it for a better understanding of the functions maps served. Future historians of Asian cartography will need to study not only science and technology, but also art, mythology, and religion. The origins of astronomy in religious needs have long been understood; less well understood and appreciated are the origins of cartography in religion. To a great extent, mapmakers in Europe broke off this relationship during the Renaissance. Those in Asia maintained it well into the nineteenth century, and in some areas, especially Greater Tibet, the nexus remains strong. Nevertheless, maps in the Buddhist tradition, to name but one Asian religion, are still little studied, particularly those produced in China and Korea. Not much is known about what artifacts survive, and the same holds for the range of uses these maps served and the conventions regarding their manufacture.

Another promising research frontier is the technological aspects of map production. The vast majority of East Asian maps were disseminated through the woodcut medium, but the processes of block making and taking impressions were quite different from their Western equivalents. In a culture that valued fineness and subtlety of expression in the graphic arts, we need to ask why line engraving on metal plates was not used for map printing in China when it was quite clearly present for ornamental metalwork, and why the comparative crudity of the woodcut was deemed acceptable for maps. We need to know far more about the processes of copying and publication and the means of dissemination, selling, and ownership in those cultures where multiple copies of maps were made. Since printed maps almost invariably appeared in books, these questions will also have to be asked of students of book production in China, since they do not seem to have been answered previously.

Another obvious desideratum is obtaining a clearer and more complete picture of what cartographic impulses were transmitted at particular periods from one part of Asia to another and between the several major regions of Asia and other parts of the world. Specific routes, dates, and agents of transmission as well as the reasons for transmission have to be ascertained. In general, deter-

mining such facts will require a much deeper search of relevant documents than has been possible so far, as well as the accumulation of a body of datable artifacts sufficiently complete to reconstruct a reasonably continuous record of the types of maps produced in different periods of history for each of the regions that concern us. The meagerness of our existing knowledge in respect to the diffusion of cartographic knowledge and artifacts is perhaps the greatest single lacuna confronting historians of Asian cartography. Some previous attempts have been made to suggest lines of transmission of certain cartographic ideas, such as the grid. Joseph Needham published a diagram in *Science and Civilisation in China* (vol. 3, table 40) showing the possible transmission of the idea of parallels and meridians from Ptolemy to a tradition of grids for which he claims Pei Xiu was famous. On the same diagram he traces a possible reciprocal route of the idea from the grid maps of the Song dynasty through al-Qazwīnī and Marino Sanudo and so to the European Renaissance. But as we have seen, the idea of the Chinese grid (seen as of great value for imposing order on towns and the landscape) was very different from the idea of a global graticule of parallels and meridians, for which the Chinese had little use or interest. Studies of the transmission of cartographic ideas must therefore start with a precise understanding of the ideas themselves, and of what they really meant for the cultures involved.

The scope of the study of traditional Asian cartography could be broadened in other ways as well. Our knowledge so far has been based largely on investigations focused on the social elites. For a complete understanding of map use and production in the cultures studied here, we have to determine whether and how the map consciousness of elites differed from that of commoners. Maps from nonliterate, tribal societies present a different set of problems, and it remains to be demonstrated whether they are in some ways fundamentally different from those made in societies where maps often complement or supplement written texts.

### TOWARD A NEW CARTOGRAPHIC HISTORICISM

This book appears at a time of renewed interest in historical studies. The work presented here accords with the interdisciplinary tendencies of much recent work in the field. It also validates the current reaction against totalizing schemes or models as a means of understanding history across cultures. We have tried to be as empirical and inductive as possible, to treat cultures on their own terms, to let the data lead us to conclusions, and not to let modern presuppositions skew our perceptions.

Our approach has much in common with the “new

historicism,” according to which cultural artifacts should be interpreted in light of historical evidence in context. The objections to this approach, namely the incompleteness of the historical record and the loss of standards that cultural relativism entails, do not seem to seriously invalidate the contribution to knowledge of which our method is capable. On the first score, as noted above, some materials may be irretrievably lost, but that does not preclude constructing narratives of the past. The result may be a plurality of narratives, differing in how they reconstruct the gaps in the record. On the second point, contextualism—which, along with the plurality of narratives, is often associated with a relativist view of truth (that there is no certain ground for knowledge)—need not result in the loss of standards or values. The result can be a reformulation or a refounding of values. In this history, for example, by looking at other cartographies, we have learned to see modern Western cartography in a new light. Western cartography developed out of practices that recognized, at least to some extent, the human dimensions discussed above. The traditional practices of East and Southeast Asia represent paths that Western cartography could have followed but did not, at some cost.

Nor need a plurality of narratives lead to confusion or even despair, as those who wish for a coherent central narrative might claim. It is still possible to separate plausible from implausible, convincing from unconvincing, and good from bad narratives. The narratives presented here are the ones that seem to make the most sense based on available materials. We have tried to explain why we believe these accounts are an improvement over past narratives. We look forward to hearing future retellings and to learning from other storytellers.