



Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

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[A Map of the World] Bankoku Ichiran no Zu

Stock#: 71550
Map Maker: Ishun

Date: 1800 circa
Place: Osaka?
Color: Pen & Ink with Wash Color
Condition: See Description
Size: 67.75 x 67.75 inches

Price: Not Available



Description:

The Original Prototype For An Important World Map By An Influential Neo-Confucian Scholar and Mapmaker

A rare and monumental manuscript wall-map compiled during the isolationism of the Edo-period (1600-1868) and depicting a world that is more imagined than observed.

While we are privileged to handle and study a wide array of extraordinary maps and documents, now and again we come across something truly exceptional, as is the case with this extremely decorative Japanese map of the world. It was produced in an era in which Japan was slowly opening up to the surrounding world, after having lived in self-imposed isolation for centuries. It is a fascinating insight into a completely different perception of the world, and consequently a great pleasure for us to present.

Ultimately, this is a map that plays many roles: it stimulates thought and conversation, it commands any room in which it is displayed. Where one viewer perceives the deep traditions of Japanese history and culture, another sees a work of modern art in which an exquisite visuality has been given priority, both in its conceptualization and its execution. The map clearly serves to visualize the world in a two-dimensional form, but it is the criteria of that visualization that are so fundamentally different from those seen in



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Western maps of this time. As such, it is not only a monumental artistic achievement but also a testimony to diversity in the history of map-making itself.

From cartographic prototype to *objet d'art du Japonisme*

This map was compiled by Koyano Ishun, a Neo-Confucian scholar with a keen interest in the still esoteric fields of geography and cartography. He produced a series of well-known maps, made famous by their mass production as woodblock prints for educational and administrative purposes. One of Koyano's most famous maps was a world map printed in Osaka in 1809, which was widely used as a didactic tool for Neo-Confucian scholars. Our map offered here constitutes the hand-drawn prototype for that 1809 map and is as such both unique and seminal.

The map in its current configuration consists of a joined folding-screen in two panels. It was painted in polychrome ink on paper, which was then joined before being applied to the screen and equipped with a brocade silk border. The reverse of the screen has been papered with Japanese accounting sheets from the 1920s, a clue that provides us with the likely decade in which the map was mounted in this particular form. Additionally, the conversion of the map to a form of decorative art aligns well with the modalities of Japonisme: a high trend of the early 20th century.

In 1852, American president Millard Fillmore ordered the U.S. Navy to force Japan to open her ports to American trade. A fleet spearheaded by Commodore Matthew Perry arrived in Japan with orders of using 'gunboat diplomacy' if necessary to achieve their goal. After Japan had been closed to the outside world for more than two centuries, the country was opened under American pressure in 1854, and as a consequence Japanese society underwent a rapid and dramatic change from feudal society to industrialized nation. Following the opening of Japan there was an intense global interest in all things Japanese. This trend also manifested itself in the arts, where Japanese arts and crafts were celebrated, collected, and emulated by Westerners.

It was the French art critic Philippe Burty who in 1872 first coined the term 'Japonisme' to describe the trend. The impact of and interest in Japanese art exploded in the following decades, and famous European artists such as Van Gogh began emulating the traditional ukiyo-e woodblock prints. In time, the interest transcended into the sphere of collecting and interior design as well, creating intense demand for Japanese antiques among European and American dealers at the beginning of the 20th century.

In this light, and following our analysis below, we believe that the story of our map can be summed up as follows: It was conceived and compiled in the latter part of the 18th century, probably during the 1790s, constituting Koyano Ishun's response to the perceived inadequacies of available cartographic materials at that point. Considering the artistic qualities of the map, its execution presumably took several years. Once



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finished, around the year 1800, Koyano probably used this map for his own teaching purposes. Demand for Japanese world maps was nevertheless on the rise and during the first decade of the 19th-century arrangements were made to have the manuscript map transferred to a woodblock for printing. With the printed version being issued in 1809, the original manuscript was probably archived or eventually stashed somewhere. A century or so later, during the height of Japonisme and with the demand for Japanese antiques soaring, our hypothesis is that this map was 'rediscovered,' sold to an antiques dealer, and then mounted on the present folding screen to become one of the iconic Japanese items that were being incorporated into the decor of ateliers and homes across Europe and America.

In this way, the creation of the map and the subsequent object it became represent two processes that are complete opposites: closing and opening. In other words, the two great developments that shaped Early Modern Japan — its isolationism and its subsequent re-entry onto the world stage — are encapsulated in this one single work.

Description

The map was conceived from a Japan-centric world view, a perspective that is hardly surprising. Its purpose was to provide a visual rendition of Japanese ideas of world geography, and to do so in an aesthetically pleasing form. Yet the map was also distinctly functional, as we see for example in the extensive annotations of place names and regional divisions. Lands, provinces, settlements, rivers, lakes, and mountains have all being labeled, though in some areas considerably more than in others. Many of the labels appear in small boxes, indicating provincial or other administrative partitions. A large titular cartouche at the bottom of the map has suffered some minor loss, but examining the printed version of the map allows us to recreate the text with a high degree of certainty. It is also possible to discern the map's title, *Bankoku Ichiran no Zu* (A Map of the World), and its maker, Koyano Ishun.

From a Western perspective, the map looks strange for charts produced as late as 1800. But it is important to remember that the great cartographic advancements in Europe and the Americas coincided in Japan with the Sakoku policy ("closed country"): an Edo period era of mandated seclusion and isolation that lasted for more than two centuries (circa 1633 - 1853). Inaugurated after more than a hundred and twenty years of extremely violent civil wars known as the Sengoku period, Edo rule was established by Tokogawa Ieyasu, who ruled from Edo (modern Tokyo). Tokogawa Ieyasu sought to forge a strong and united Japan by increasing internal control and limiting outside influences. The isolationism of this period meant that knowledge, and in particular knowledge-sharing, was tightly controlled and limited to a select few in the upper echelons of an extremely hierarchical society. This state of isolationism is evident from our map, for while areas such as China and Japan have been depicted with a degree of accuracy, the rest of the world looks more like the kind of conceptualization we would expect to find European maps from



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centuries earlier.

Koyano Ishun drew on a limited number of sources when compiling his map, and their chronological incoherence and diverse provenances seem to have muddled his conceptions more than to clarify them. (Radu Leca of Heidelberg University has suggested that the deviations from geographical reality found 2 in Early Modern Japanese maps reflect an inherent view of the world from a topological rather than topographical perspective (Leca 2020).) Despite still being relatively isolated in the 1790s — when he was likely compiling this map — Koyano does draw on a range of foreign sources, including a world map compiled by a Jesuit for the Ming Emperor, 16th-century Korean maps, and Japanese deviations of Joan Blaeu's 1648 world map. The odd outline of the Indian Subcontinent was drawn from an influential map by the Buddhist priest Hotan (1654-1728), published in 1710. This eclectic combination of sources, yet no baseline of up-to-date charts and data to draw on, is ultimately what caused a trained cartographer to create a chart that is a fascinating departure from observable reality.

Asia

The map centers on eastern Asia, with Japan and China being the geographic heart from which the map emanates. As the main source of verifiable geographic information at the time was China, it is the Chinese mainland which features the highest concentration of toponyms. This centric perspective is entirely in line with a long cartographic tradition in Japan at this stage and is not unlike the Eurocentric disposition of world maps in Western tradition. Asia is not only the most clearly defined entity on the map, but also by far the most accurate and detailed region; although we should not necessarily perceive geographical accuracy to have been a central ambition in its compilation. Certain features have been meticulously rendered, but most of these also have a very direct bearing on Japan and her people. Thus, we find a detailed Chinese mainland, a well-annotated Korea, and a decisively delineated Sea of Okhotsk, along with the island of Sakhalin.

The map also includes a number of vivid pictorial renditions in Asia, with iconic locations such as Mount Fuji or the Great Wall of China standing out most clearly. But throughout the landscape, topographic features have been carefully drawn in as small images of mountains or valleys. Other depictions include extensive riverine systems in China, India, and Baluchistan/Persia (i.e. the Indus), all of which have been painstakingly labeled. The fact that the landmarks selected for pictorial inclusion consist both of natural and manmade features, demonstrates just some of the divergence in tradition between eastern and western map-making. Koyano is creating an aesthetic; for example, if we take the way many mountains are represented, we see that they are much larger than they could possibly be in reality, and as such are not an actual attempt to plot the ranges with precision. The iconography underlines the importance of visuality over accuracy in this map; a feature that is later mitigated in the crisper rendition of the printed



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version, but nevertheless still a prominent feature. In general, we might conclude that the criteria for compiling a seminal map in late 18th century Japan just were very different from those faced by mapmakers in other parts of the world.

The map was drawn using colored ink, lending it not only a vivacious presence, but also allowing the individual zones of the map to stand out clearly through color-coding. The colors selected convey a degree of intentionality, although we cannot say for certain what that is. We can, however, start by noting that certain colors have been used in accordance with general perception. Thus, water is blue, land is green or yellow, and cold regions are white. Looking a little closer, certain elements in the coloring stand out. For example, while the Arctic and Antarctic regions quite logically have been rendered in an icy white, so has the north Japanese Ezo region, represented most clearly by the island of Hokkaido. While this is likely attributed to the fact that the map is Japanese in origin and the mountainous Ezo region indeed is extremely frigid in winter, it is noteworthy that it is the only non-polar region in the world depicted in this manner. This depiction demonstrates that this map was compiled from a largely inward-looking mindset.

Moving west from the frozen island of Hokkaido, we note another anomaly in the color-coding of the map. The Korean Peninsula is the only region on the entire map marked in a strong red. We have not been able to ascertain the exact meaning of this but do note that for centuries Korea served as Japan's gateway to the Chinese mainland. There are other color-based distinctions in play as well, for example between the northern wildernesses of Mongolia and eastern Siberia, which have been colored in a lush green, and the more densely cultivated and inhabited lands in China and west of the majestic Ural range, which are held in a sandy yellow. An amorphous blob north of the Great Wall, delineated in outline and by use of stippled dots, presumably represents the Gobi Desert or steppe lands in general. A color distinction also applies between Arabia (green) and Greater Persia (yellow), suggesting that the colors may be seen as representing a mode of distinguishing between different types of regions on a global scale.

Another feature requiring careful attention but well worth noting is the use of hachure and shadings to indicate altitude. This was a brand-new visual technique in the late 18th century and shows that Koyano was up to date with the latest developments in cartography within Japan. A very similar technique can be observed in the works of Koyano's contemporary, Nagakubo Sekisui, who often is credited as one of Japan's cartographic innovators (for an example of a Sekisui world map, see: <https://rmda.kulib.kyoto-u.ac.jp/item/rb00022877>).

Even though Asia has been in its own way comprehensively rendered, the other continents are clearly the products of a strange combination of cultural indifference to the outside world and the imposed seclusion and limited knowledge-exchange that Sakoku engendered. Much of the map is reminiscent of the way in which the world was envisioned in the Ptolemaic tradition. Part of the reason for this is linked to the aim of Japanese scholars (like Koyano Ishun) to create their own conceptual models of the earth. These models



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were not built solely on observation, at least not the sensory kind, but were also imbued with mythology, ritual, and symbolism. They are panoptic views from a gilded cage.

The Americas

The mind immediately perceives something strange along the right side of the map: the Americas, which have been warped to such a degree that they are hardly recognizable. The two continents have been rendered as amorphous, elongated blobs with little semblance to their actual physiographic appearance. In North America, almost nothing is recognizable. A few coastal rivers and the occasional mountain are shown, as well as a single great river traversing the entire continent from east to west, possibly a representation of the centuries-old notion of the "River of the West," a transcontinental waterway linking the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. California is depicted as an island; a common misconception in the 17th century, but a deeply antiquated one by the dawn of the 19th century.

North and South America are depicted as separated at roughly the Isthmus of Panama; a concept seen in early 16th century European maps. Overall, the blatant lack of geographic knowledge on our map is further revealed in the very limited number of place names on these continents. Only ten toponyms are noted in North America, written in Chinese characters alongside a Japanese phonetic version. In South America, a few labels demarcate well-known coastal stretches in Peru, Pernambuco, and Argentina.

South America has been equipped with large rivers, but here too none of them correspond to any recognizable reality. A large lake in the upper half of the continent seems to echo a common feature on 17th-century European maps: Lake Parime. This mysterious lake has been repeatedly associated with the legend of Eldorado: a city of gold supposedly located on its shores. To the south, the area of Tierra del Fuego includes an inland body of water with a massive island (a comparison of other islands on the map reveals that dwarfs Cuba, for example).

A final but important element of the Americas is found in the far north, where we see the promontories of Kamchatka and Alaska clearly depicted and elements such as the Bering Strait accurately labeled. While we may generally note that the eastern half of the Russian Empire is quite well defined, with toponyms and regional divisions clearly visible, the rendition of Arctic America is considerably more ill-conceived. Perhaps the map's strangest element is a bombastic northern extension of the American landmass to become an enormous Arctic continent in itself. In the middle of this polar continent, we see a brightly gilded star with sixteen beams emanating from it. It is labeled 'Hokkyoku,' or North Pole. By connecting the Arctic so manifestly to North America, a large enclosed oceanic space is created above Asia and Europe. This is balanced visually with an equally sizable Indian Ocean in the map's southern half. In unison the two oceans contradict the established Western visualization of the world as having its two largest masses of water to the east and west of Eurasia rather than north and south of it, making a striking



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impression on the modern viewer. (Despite the seemingly strange appearance of the continents on this map, we find further evidence of how Edo period cartographers entertained geographic views of the world that were fundamentally at odds with the empirically anchored mainstream views of Western cartography. Thus, in another world map from Koyano Ishun's hand that is more or less contemporary with our map, we find Europe and the Americas represented as a string of islands running northwest to southeast (<https://open.library.ubc.ca/collections/tokugawa/items/1.0227940#p0z-4r0f:Bankoku%20no%20zue>).

Africa

To the west, we find an equally warped Africa, which by European standards of the time seems almost unrecognizable. This does not mean to imply that Japanese traditions were inferior to those of Europe or the Americas; rather, it serves to remind us that the purpose and meaning of maps were entirely different from the guiding principles in Europe at the time. Despite its distorted nature, the African continent does have a number of intriguing features. Most prominent is an elaborate system of rivers centering on a huge internal lake. This concept was most likely drawn from the known European maps, which since Ptolemy had held that an enormous central African lake, often termed Zaire Lacus, constituted the source of the Nile. The Nile is clearly recognizable on the map, although this is mostly because it is the most elaborate river in Africa and runs from the large central lake north to culminate in the Mediterranean. While the composition around a central lake was borrowed from European traditions, there is also evidence of Sino Japanese traditions in the way Africa has been shown. The warped shape, for example, creates an extraordinarily large Red Sea and reflects a Late Medieval Chinese perspective, in which the maritime Silk Road stretched across the Indian Ocean and into the Red Sea, culminating at the metropolis of Cairo.

Europe

Above the strange-looking African continent, we find a slightly more recognizable Europe. The fact that Europe has been slightly better rendered is no doubt due to the growing influence of Europeans on the global stage, even in isolationist Japan. But it is also because the European tradition of functional, observation-based cartography made a significant impact on Japanese geographic conceptions during the Edo period. This happened both through Chinese and Korean maps, but also through Dutch traders, who from 1609 and until the forced reopening in 1854 enjoyed a monopoly on European trade with Japan. Recognizable physiographic features stand out much more clearly than in Africa and America. Thus, we can easily identify the Iberian, Italian, and Greek Peninsulas, as well as France and the British Isles. Even Scandinavia, despite having an odd form, can easily be identified by the modern viewer. The Bosphorus and Black Sea are also palpably evident on the map, though Istanbul does not seem to have made it. In general, there are very few urban centers depicted on the map. Europe has nonetheless been provided



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with more extensive and correct labeling than its African and American counterparts, with places like Scotland, Ireland, and England all correctly named.

Background to Japanese mapmaking

In order to understand some of the intellectual mechanisms behind the creation of this map, we must first consider the context in which it was compiled. Well into the 18th and even early 19th century, Japanese maps, especially world maps, drew on a peculiar amalgamation of different cartographic traditions. The renowned scholar Shintaru Ayusawa identifies five categories of world maps into which most existing examples fit: Objective, Buddhist, Chinese, Japanese, and Legendary. The classification is important because it not only tells us about the particular types of sources used in compiling maps within each tradition, but also allows us to explore our map as an innovative synergy of the different active cartographic traditions in Japan.

The period we are dealing with, commonly known as *Sakoku* or the Age of Isolation (roughly 1633-1853), was one in which contact with the outside world was not just restricted, but largely illegal. The only real contact that the Tokugawa Shogunate allowed was trade, and this was only with Chinese and Dutch merchants, and only at the international port of Nagasaki. Scholars, teachers, and intellectuals were in other words stripped of external sources of knowledge, and consequently had to rely on a combination of their own traditions, observations, and imaginations, with no means of verification available to them.

The first contact with Europeans occurred in 1543 and in the following decades a steady stream of Portuguese, Dutch, and Spanish merchants sailed on the Japanese islands. This was initially an age of bloody strife and aristocratic rivalry, but by the dawn of the 17th century, power had been consolidated in the hands of the Tokugawa family, who decided from an early stage on a strategy of isolation from the world. Prior to this development, Japan had nevertheless actively engaged with many Asian and European foreigners, and this had partly resulted in the exchange of ideas and knowledge. Until 1600, we thus find a more scientific and observation-based tradition for mapmaking in Japan.

In the fields of cartography and geography, the *Sakoku* policy meant that in order to develop geographic ideas, Sino-Korean and Buddhist traditions were merged with European views of the world. Many of the Sino-Korean traditions had been adopted after several world maps were brought back to Japan between 1592 and 1598 as spoils of war in Toyotomi Hideyoshi's campaign to conquer China via the Korean Peninsula. The European ideas, on the other hand, followed less expected paths into the awareness of Japanese cartographers.

The most important collection of European source material for world maps from this period was the eleven maps compiled by the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci between 1584 and 1608. Ricci was stationed at the



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Chinese court and produced his maps for the Ming Emperor. In spite of this, all of his maps quickly found their way across the sea and into Japan. The most important source was an eight-sheet world map from 1602. This was widely distributed, and an original copy of this map still exists in the library of Kyoto University today. Ricci's maps introduced Asian courts to the geographical knowledge of the West and exercised a huge influence on both Chinese and Japanese mapmaking in the following centuries.

At roughly the same time that Ricci's maps were published, the first European traders landed in Japan. The fleet was Dutch, although lead by the Englishman William Adams, and over time their arrival ensured a Dutch monopoly on the Japan trade for the next 150 years. Around 1650, a Dutch captain brought the recent world map by Joan Blaeu (1648) as one of several gifts for the Shōgun. The map made an impression and was quickly incorporated into the imperial library. It soon became a revered artifact and an important source for geographical knowledge. Over time, additional Dutch maps were accumulated by the Shogunate. So much so, in fact, that an entire branch of geography in Japan came to be known as 'Dutch Studies.'

For most of the 17th and 18th centuries, the Ricci and Blaeu maps were the main, if not only, European sources available to Japanese scholars. Other important sources consisted of Buddhist maps like that of Hotan (1710), in which India is the absolute center of the world, and where little to no attention is paid to European ideas. To this already eclectic mix may then be added a plethora of Chinese and China-centric maps, as well as Japan's own internal cartographic traditions.

The current map is, in other words, the product of an extremely secluded environment, and of a cartography that not only is highly variegated in its eclecticism, but which deliberately limits the intellectual framework for producing maps to certain perspectives. This is the world in which Koyano Ishun drew this new conceptualization of the world for his students. However, despite the odd coalescence of highly distinct traditions and the difficulties faced by knowledge-seekers in a closed society, Koyano was also working within a new framework of intellectual curiosity and drive in Japan. In the same decades that Koyano compiled our map and converted it to a woodblock for mass printing, a number of innovative Japanese cartographers were working on similar projects.

One example is Shisen Inagi, who in 1802 published a reduced and fully translated version of Ricci's world map for the Japanese market. The aim was to make the information from this two-hundred-year-old map broadly available to students and scholars alike. An even more impressive, and in many ways also more scientific accomplishment, was the world map by Kageyasu Takahashi — Shutei Bankoku Zenzu (New Universal Map) — which was published in 1810. In addition to drawing on Ricci and all the available Dutch maps, Takahashi had managed to acquire several maps by renowned English cartographer Aaron Arrowsmith, which he used in his compilation process. But he did more than just consult new and forbidden sources. When he found that European conceptions of the Sea of Okhotsk and especially



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Sakhalin were inconsistent with his own, he sent a small expeditionary force north to ascertain whether or not Sakhalin was in fact an island or a peninsula. In confirming its insular nature, he included this detail on a world map before any of his European contemporaries.

At the end of the day, Koyano Ishun's map shows a world that is separated from itself. It applied different principles of centrality, rendition, and distance than those to which we are accustomed. And like many of its Buddhist counterparts, it combines the imagined world with the perceived one. Researchers have tended to draw a distinction that views Western mapmakers as largely driven by a topographical ambition of accurate representation (often laced with political aspirations), whereas in Edo Japan such ambitions were far more topological in nature. But what does this mean? How does the distinction between topography and topology as a guiding compilation principle help us understand this map? Radu Leca, a scholar of Edo period cartography explains it like this (2020):

Geographical knowledge was organized indexically as information associated with specific lands and the revered texts they were mentioned in. It is in this sense that these maps were topological - more than their specific locations, most relevant was the relationship of these toponyms to the knowledge they referred to. However, this topological scheme was malleable enough to accommodate other sources of knowledge such as that for 'New Holland'. This reveals a dynamic neo-Confucianist knowledge system that allowed for creative thought and the adoption of alternative viewpoints.

Ultimately, our map is a hybrid of cultural synergy: a product of a policy both successful and failed, and a context in which thinkers were forced to draw on whatever materials were available for scientific reference and otherwise relied heavily on their own creativity and traditions. Koyano Ishun's map is a prime example of exactly that. It combines the cartographic traditions of Japan, China, Korea, Buddhism, and the West with an undercurrent of thirst for progress and an acute sense of the Japanese aesthetic. We find it to be one of the most remarkable and profoundly beautiful maps we have worked with to date.

Detailed Condition:

Two-panel Japanese screen map of the world. Remounted in the late-19th or 20th century. The front of the map restored and stabilized, though still fragile. The paper backing of the screen partially torn away revealing the recycled paper composite backing underneath. The screen includes an old (circa 1950) exhibition label in broken English attributing the map to circa 1650. (See the third image for an illustration of the verso.)