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**Remapping the World in East Asia,
Toward a Global History of the “Ricci
Maps,” by Mario Cams and Elke
Papelitzky (eds.) Honolulu: University
of Hawai‘i Press, 2024. Pp. 320.
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REVIEWED BY

Evan Liddle

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Evan Liddle graduated from The University of California Santa Barbara with a BA in History and Geography, and later received a Master’s in Education. He is currently enrolled in the Master’s of Global History at the Freie Universität Berlin. Evan is interested in epistemologies, and the history of science and technology.

In the traditional histories of science, fields such as geography, astronomy and cartography were developed in Europe and diffused to the rest of the world. The Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci was one of the central figures contributing to this Eurocentric narrative since the sixteenth century. Ricci worked at the late Ming Chinese court in Beijing and produced several well-known cartographic maps (the so-called “Ricci Maps”) based on European Renaissance Era knowledge to introduce “modern, correct geography” to China, so the story goes.¹ Against this Eurocentric account, *Remapping the World in East Asia: Toward a Global History of the “Ricci Maps,”* presents a refreshing counterpoint.

Remapping the World is a collection of essays from various scholars, edited by sinologists Mario Cams and Elke Papelitzky, both contributing their own essays. Papelitzky’s research interests lie in Chinese maps and mapmaking in a global context, and her contribution focuses on the Japanese reception of Ricci-inspired maps from China (chapter six). Cams specializes in the cartography of early modern Japan and China, and has worked to bring Chinese maps to wider audiences through his online *QingMaps* project.² His contribution to the book traces the incorporation and later repackaging of the information in the Ricci Maps into maps in Chinese mapmaking traditions (chapter five).³

The volume is divided into two parts. The first part of the book, chapters one to five, focuses on the physical materials, the local conditions under which the maps were made and how such materials affected the distribution and structure of the maps. The second part of the volume, chapters six through eleven, explores the wider circulations and co-creation of maps and knowledge across East Asia and Europe.

In a broader context, the increasing popularity of global history in the last two decades has meant increasing attention paid to pre-modern interactions between various Asian and European merchants, missionaries, and soldiers in popular histories. In stories like these, Matteo Ricci is still at the center of global discourse regarding the circulation and co-construction of cartographic knowledge. Around the 400th anniversary of Ricci’s death in 2011, a number of published popular books in English celebrated Ricci, framing him as filling a

1 For examples of this framing in English publications, see R. Po-chia Hsia, *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City: Matteo Ricci 1552–1610* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Michela Fontana, *Matteo Ricci: A Jesuit in the Ming Court* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011); Mary Laven, *Mission to China: Matteo Ricci and the Jesuit Encounter with the East* (London: Faber & Faber, 2011).

2 For this paper, “early modern” refers to 1450–1750 CE. For debates around this term, see Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *What Is Early Modern History?* (Cambridge Medford: Polity, 2021).

3 Mario Cams and Elke Papelitzky, eds., *Remapping the World in East Asia: Toward a Global History of the “Ricci Maps”* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2024), 140, 148–149.

gap in Chinese cartographic knowledge.⁴ *Remapping the World* seeks to move beyond this unidirectional narrative with two approaches.

The first approach focuses on the production of the maps and other artifacts and their transmission across Asia, as opposed to seeing these artifacts as symbols of singular worldviews. This emphasis interrogates the decision-making process of the map makers and their later distributors, shedding light on local contexts, local agencies, and local debates over epistemologies that circulated within the territory of early modern Korea, Japan, and China. This echoes the Taiwanese theorist Chen Kuan-hsing's "Asia as method" framework, a method by which "Asia" is recognized as a series of heterogeneous regions, and its history is constructed through references and interactions between these regions. Such can be seen in this volume, an inter-Asian discussion and utilization of cartographic knowledge, such as maps made in China and their transmission and transformation in Korea and Japan.⁵

The second approach puts those local agencies, contexts, and debates within a global framework, looking beyond a single political body. Without ignoring the locality and materiality of the maps and other artifacts under study, the contributors nonetheless want to demonstrate how new versions of maps created and distributed during the early modern period, both within and between Asia and Europe, combined local elements with the newer geographic knowledge. This volume attempts to move beyond the idea of Ming-European nation-state interactions or a clash of civilizations, traditionally the story of the Ricci Maps. Rather, these chapters concentrate on the interaction and tensions between multiple systems of cosmological and geographic knowledge in a global context.⁶

The contributors to *Remapping the World* employ a wide range of methods and approaches. Examining the materials on which maps and globes were created, chains of custody, linguistic analysis of place names, consideration of publishing markets, and the geographic implications of folklore. For instance, in Chinese historian Wang Yongjie's essay (chapter three), there is a closely detailed genealogy of various editions of the *Zhifang waiji* ("Record of Foreign Lands," 職方外紀), an atlas produced in Ming China after Ricci's death. Wang demonstrates via close analysis of the printing and map prefaces that the *Zhifang waiji* was not only inspired by Ricci's work, but also incorporated older understandings of the world beyond Ming China.

4 Hsia, *A Jesuit*; Fontana, *Matteo Ricci*; Laven, *Mission to China*.

5 For more on "Asia as Method," see Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward De-imperialization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

6 Cams and Papelitzky, *Remapping the World*, 5.

Differences in printing location and discrepancies between editions reveal a multidirectional circulation of knowledge between northern and southern Ming China in terms of place names and intended audience, as opposed to the Ricci story, which is centered in northern China.⁷

The aforementioned example also highlights one of *Remapping the World's* major strengths: a wide range of non-English language scholarship. Contributors Wang Yongjie, Yang Yulei, Lin Hong and Soh Jeanhyoung are all academics from Chinese and Korean universities, their chapters in *Remapping the World* are their first English language publications. Their chapters include a higher proportion of non-English secondary literature versus other contributors, which add more fine-grained analysis of language and local histories. One such example is the contribution of Korean intellectual historian Soh Jeanhyoung, whose detailed analysis (chapter eight) of the overlap between a Korean legend and Korean maps inspired by the Ricci Maps explores the implications of language utilized in the maps.⁸

Additionally, *Remapping the World* is a unique case study in histories of interaction and the exchange of ideas. Specifically, because many recent works that explore the history of science, epistemologies and intercultural constructions of knowledge usually focus on the Age of Imperialism, the nineteenth century, and science under colonialism.⁹ As mentioned by Cams and Papelitzky in the introduction, this volume examines multiple systems of cosmological and geographic knowledge interacting in a global context where military and political power has not empowered one over others. That is not to say that politics is ignored in the analysis. Papelitzky's contribution (chapter six) focuses on the influence of anti-Christian censorship in Tokugawa Japan on maps arriving there from China.¹⁰ Chinese historian Yang Yulie (chapter seven) demonstrates how maps produced in Korea during the Joseon dynasty, while incorporating information from Ricci Maps, gave precedent to older Sinocentric geography and astronomy, a reflection of Joseon Korea's political allegiance to Ming China.¹¹

While *Remapping the World* is a fascinating and broad read, it is not without weaknesses, such as the terminology. The introduction stresses that the purpose of the book is to avoid a clash of civilization dichotomy and

7 Cams and Papelitzky, *Remapping the World*, 79–97.

8 Cams and Papelitzky, *Remapping the World*, 206–222.

9 For the quintessential example see, Kapil Raj, *Relocating Modern Science: Circulation and the Construction of Knowledge in South Asia and Europe, 1650–1900*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

10 Cams and Papelitzky, *Remapping the World*, 161–170.

11 Cams and Papelitzky, *Remapping the World*, 198–203.

explore multiple systems of knowledge via the process of artifact creation. However, the variety of knowledge systems remains unclear. The term “Renaissance Geography” appears several times as a term for the knowledge Ricci and his collaborators possessed, and the terms “Sinocentric,” “Ming Geography,” and “Ming Worldview” are used to describe political and geographic understandings originally in Ming China.¹² However, neither of these terms are elaborated or given a historiographic analysis in the introduction or a single location within the book. The editors of the volume sought to avoid binary worldviews, but it is hard to appreciate the scale of the process of transformation and integration of worldviews if they were never made clear in the first place.¹³ This weakens the book’s accessibility to non-experts.

Another weakness of the volume comes in its inability to move beyond the state as a medium of analysis. The postscript of the work notes that *Remapping the World* wished to show that there was no such thing as Chinese or Japanese Cartography; rather, a network of creators and distributors utilized a variety of methods to create maps for various means.¹⁴ Yet the influence of the state on the process of making maps and their contents is visible throughout. Even if the reader wishes to focus on the networks over the state actors, the volume implicitly reminds the reader of the structure of the state. Several of the major chapters that explore the networks of creation and distribution are framed through a national lens. To the credit of the contributors, there are efforts to look at other actors beyond state actors that influenced map production, such as Wang and Papelitzky (chapters three and six), who both closely examine the role of book markets as a force in the creation of particular maps. However, even these examine book markets in a national framework, such as in Tokugawa Japan and Ming China. State actors cannot be ignored as a force in map production, while the volume’s structure still has space to improve if the editors wish to minimize the states’ significance.

In conclusion, *Remapping the World* is a fascinating refashioning of the Ricci Maps utilizing global history and an inter-Asian lens of analysis. Its variety of approaches and broad base of scholarship make it invaluable to historians

12 For uses of “Renaissance Geography” in the book, see Cams and Papelitzky, *Remapping the World*, 2–5, 9, 148, 161, 206, 220. For uses of “Sinocentric,” “Ming Geography,” and “Ming Worldview,” see Cams and Papelitzky, *Remapping the World*, 125, 140, 188, 196, 200–202, 217.

13 There are a plethora of works covering “Renaissance Geography,” however a quintessential one would be Frank Lestringant, *Mapping the Renaissance World: The Geographical Imagination in the Age of Discovery*. (John Wiley & Sons, 2016). For an introduction to “Sinocentric Geography” see Edward Q Wang, “History, Space, and Ethnicity: The Chinese Worldview,” *Journal of World History* 10, no. 2 (1999): 285–305.

14 Cams and Papelitzky, *Remapping the World*, 296–297.

of science, cartography and early modern encounters. Despite some issues of terminology, it is an excellent introductory work with full-color illustrations and a pleasure to read for both experts and laypeople alike.