

Workstattgespräche: Histories of Planning

12 March, 10:30-12:00 Hyunhee Park: World Maps Produced by Specific Planning in the Medieval World

You are about to hear the first interview held as part of the working conversation series „Histories of Planning“ presented by Dep III Artefact, Action and Knowledge at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin. The interviewee is Hyunhee Park, Assistant Professor of Chinese History at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, The City University of New York, author of *Mapping the Chinese and Islamic Worlds: Cross-Cultural Exchange in Pre-Modern Asia* (Cambridge University Press 2012).

Questions are asked by Dagmar Schäfer and Francesca Bray

Dagmar Schäfer: I am delighted to have Hyunhee Park here who has published a book on maps in the Islamic and Asian worlds and who joined us today to answer some questions we have about planning which is an on going topic in the department. An overarching question of this interview will be what planning actually means to us and to the historical actors. So, can you give us a rough, very spontaneous idea about what planning actually means for you and what it means in your work?

Hyunhee Park: Before I was invited to the talk I never thought about planning in specific way. I just thought it's a matter of course and a common practice: everyone is doing it, but after I learnt about this, I began to think about it more seriously and to see it as a very important factor, the motivation of history. If something was done there was planning, whether it was good or not. When I connect planning and maps, I think maps are good for visualising things, like those mind maps – maybe ten years ago or so a book about our mind map became really popular in South Korea. I don't know if you ever heard about it when people read a book or think about their writing or their plans they don't just write some notes, but they actually draw their ideas in a map and connect different ideas, so when they have finished the reading or thinking they can just look at the map as a mind map and then have a clear idea of their plan and their goal.

Dagmar Schäfer: It's fascinating that you start with this visual perspective, with this visual fraction of a map where you actually go and have a map as a kind of guideline how to watch, how to move in space, and probably also how to think. But, based on your experience with large numbers of collections of maps, do you think there are any special cultural approaches to maps? Is it always the visual function that is really important to the maps or do you see differences between the Chinese and the Islamic maps for instance, or between different periods?

Hyunhee Park: I have been focussing on the maps before fifteen hundred and especially the two regions China and the Islamic world. And more specifically I focussed on world maps. So I think, for China and the Islamic World there are similarities, commonalities and also differences. For example both China and the Islamic World in the pre-modern period were interceding in the wider world, and they were actively knowledgeable about the different regions, but Chinese geographers did not draw world maps. They were very good at making maps of China. There was a highly developed administrative system throughout the ancient period; in all periods of China after unification and due to this centralised administrative system they efficiently collected data from different regions. They were also able to collect maps of different regions and some people in the map department of the Chinese court used these data. So, they should have made a plan for the collecting of this data, but they, I think, they didn't actually plan to draw the world map. And a Caliph in the Abbasid period actually had a project, a big map making project (i.e. The world map of Caliph al Ma'mun from Ibn Fadlallah al-Umari 1301-1349, see Park, p. 145). He wanted to draw an accurate map and he even wanted projects of the location of different cities.

And based on the map itself, which is no longer extant, but according to authorities who claimed that they saw it, the map was very accurate.

Dagmar Schäfer: Using that specific example, would you then say that, you can look at maps in two ways: you can look at maps as the product of a planning process or as something that is a tool of planning, an instrument. So where is the transition? How do the maps change function?

Hyunhee Park: With the world map drawn by the Islamic scholars, their purpose was just pure curiosity. Some people think they had had an expansionist function - they use the map to try to expand Islam in other regions. But actually it is more about scholarly curiosity: the function is actually in the knowledge they just wanted to know about the world.

Francesca Bray: Actually carrying on from this, there is a neat contrast that Descartes makes, I think, between a map and a plan. Not talking about planning to do something, but forms of visual representation. So, the philosophy behind a map is to be accurate and complete... These are ideal types. And the philosophy behind a plan – like the underground map of Berlin – is to get you from one subway station to the other subway station.

Hyunhee Park: Yes!

Dagmar Schäfer: And of course in reality all plans are maps and all maps are plans in that sense, because they represent choices and they represent ideas of what is important and ideas of what are your goals. So, I wonder if you could say a little bit more about how you might, how you might try and go from the map that we can see today to some of these choices and world views that you have in fact investigated in your book. Could you say a little bit more about how we can go from the codes that are used in mapping to the goals of making that kind of map and therefore the planning that went into making that kind of map?

Hyunhee Park: Based on my experience I believe it's possible to classify different types of maps and maps drawn for different purposes and different goals... actually I plan to explore more of this in my next project in which I broaden the scope and the time, for example of world mapping and exchanging of knowledge from medieval to early modern period. So I want to focus on classifying the knowledge. What methods did the Chinese use to understand the world and what are their concepts? So, for example in the ancient period, they thought the sky is round and all seas rectangular. And that is very different from the understanding of the world from ancient Greek Roman period and also the Muslims who adapted the understanding of the world from Greek and Roman society. Also interesting is how traditional understanding developed and suddenly changed at certain points, for example how the Chinese people began to understand the world from a different perspective in the Mongol period, because of the new geographical materials brought by the Muslim scholars, Jamal al-Din (i.e. Jamal ad-Din Muḥammad ibn Ṭāhir ibn Muḥammad al-Zaydī al-Bukhārī, 13th century Muslim astronomer) and other people, too. And they introduced a globe - a new concept for the Chinese Geographers.

Dagmar Schäfer: Do you have examples where you can actually say: This one map has been contextualised differently?

Hyunhee Park: Just one example: the Chinese map during the Mongol period. During the Mongol period many Muslim scholars were working in the Chinese Court and one of them called Jamal al-Din, he introduced a lot of astronomical and Islamic maps. These maps included West-Asia and Africa would have been circulating to some degree in China for the first time, and that had some influence on the Chinese people.

Dagmar Schäfer: Do you think that these different types of maps come out of how people think about the aggregation of data? Or is it because of the context?

Hyunhee Park: It's not just the aggregation of data. We have to understand it in the context. I would like to explore it further and also in my first book I tried to bring as much context as possible for some maps we know and for, unfortunately for medieval maps not many processes and not many contexts are documented.

Dagmar Schäfer: So once a map is there it really is like what Francesca just said, it's a question of choice how you actually use it in context. It seems to be that maps still need to be on our plan for future research. Thank you very much, Hyunhee.

End of interview

