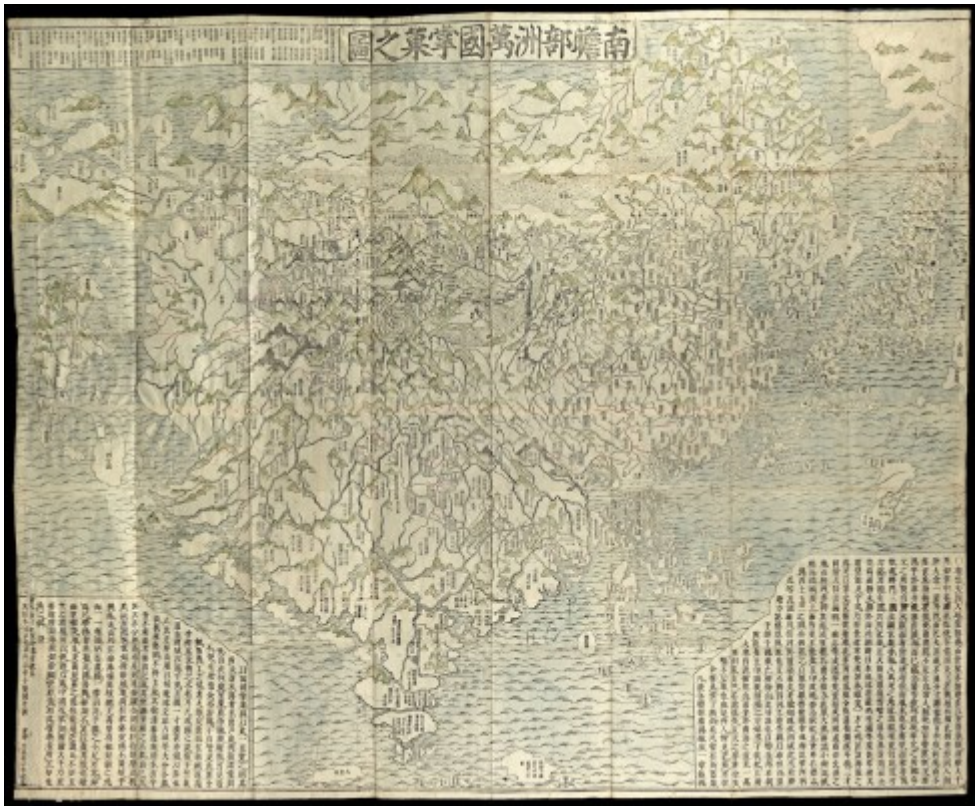


Woodblock with contemporary hand-colour.

THE FIRST BUDDHIST WORLD MAP PRINTED IN JAPAN

Nansenbushu bankoku shoka no zu.

Author
ZUDA ROKASHI [Priest Hotan]

Publication date
[1710].

Publisher
[Kyoto] Uhei Bundaiken

Publication place

Physical description
Woodblock with contemporary hand-colour.

Dimensions
1145 by 1415mm. (45 by 55.75 inches).

Notes
The first Buddhist world map printed in Japan and the prototype for all subsequent Buddhist world maps printed in Japan until the late nineteenth century. The author, Hotan (1654-1728), was a scholar-priest and founder of the Kegonji Temple in Kyoto. The earliest known example in Japan is the Gotenjiku Zu (Map of the Five Indies) by the priest Jukai dating from 1364 and now preserved in Horyuji Temple in Nara. However Hotan's map was revolutionary in being the first printed Oriental map to introduce detailed Western cartographic information into this traditional Buddhist

cosmological view and to attempt to merge the two together into a comprehensible form. Europe is depicted as a series of islands in the upper left of the image whilst South America is likewise another island in the lower right of the image. Africa is omitted completely. China and Japan are clearly defined in the upper right of the map. The popularity of the map is evidenced by the fact that although the map is dated 1710, it was reissued unchanged in numerous editions through to about 1815 and spawned innumerable copies and derivatives over the next 150 years. a rare and important cartographic work.

This map is a great example of Buddhist cosmology combined real world cartography. It is the prototype for all Buddhist world maps.
They all represent a large, imaginary India, where Buddha was born, as the heart of the world, but also depictions of Europe and the New World.

At the time being, Japan maintained an isolationist policy which began in 1603 with the Edo period under the military ruler Tokugawa Ieyasu, and lasting for nearly 270 years. Although knowing the world map by Matteo Ricci, published in Peking in 1602, Japanese maps mainly showed a purely Sino-centric view – or with acknowledgement of Buddhist traditional teaching – the Buddhist habitable world with an identifiable Indian sub-continent.

The map was drawn by the scholar-priest Zuda Rokashi, founder of Kegonji Temple in Kyoto, and illustrates the fusion of existing Buddhist and poorly known European cartography. The language is Chinese, except for a few Japanese characters on the illustrations of European countries.

Europe is shown at upper left as a group of islands, which can be identified from Iceland to England, Scandinavia, Poland, Hungary and Turkey, but deliberately deleting the Iberian Peninsula. At lower right South America is featured as an island south of Japan with a small peninsula as part of Central America, carrying among just a few place-names also 4 Chinese characters whose phonetical Japanese reading is “A-ME-RI-KA”. North of Japan, a land bridge joints Asia with an unnamed landmass, presumably North America. Africa is not shown at all.

On the other hand, this map is much more than a world map and the main concept by the author was to celebrate a historically very important event. The map echoes the pilgrimage route of the famous Chinese Buddhist priest Hsuan-Tsang (or Xuan Zhuang, Genjo in Japanese, 602-664 A.D.), who travelled to India to visit sacred places of Buddhism and also to collect holy sanskrit writings. So the largest part of the map is depicted to “Jambu-Dvipa” with the sacred Lake of Anavatapta (Lake Manasarovar in the Himalayas) at center, from which the 4 rivers Ganges, Oxus, Indus and Tarim are flowing. This all was based on the Japanese version of Hsuan-Tsang’s Chinese narrative, the Si-yu-ki, printed as late as 1653. Here numerous details are given, including the interesting feature of the so-called “iron-gate”, shown as a strongly over-sized square, and the path taken by the monk whilst crossing the forbidden mountain systems after leaving Samarkand.
Also, at the upper left corner 102 references from Buddhist holy writings and Chinese annals are mentioned to increase the credibility of the map.

Bibliography

K Yamashita, Japanese Maps of the Edo Period, pp.32-33 ill.

Nanba, Old Maps in Japan ill. 8.

K.Unno, Cartography in Japan, 1994, page. 346-477 and illustration 11.59.

Cortazzi, Isles of Gold page 38 and col.ill. 48.

Beans Coll. 1710.1.

Kerlen 44,

Muroga & Unno, The Buddhist World Map in Japan, in IM XVI (1962).

Harley & Woodward, The History of Cartography, 2.2, pp.428ff and ill. 11.59.

Provenance

Price:

Inventory reference: 1136

© Daniel Crouch Rare Books Ltd | 2025