

# How have Japanese Geographers Read the Works of Nineteenth-Century German Geographers?

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## Abstract

This paper addresses how Japanese geographers have read the works of 19th German geographers: Carl Ritter and Ernst Kapp. While the main problem of modern geography was understood as the environmentalism, especially the opposition between ‘environmental determinism’ and ‘possibilism’, some Japanese geographers proposed an alternative interpretation of the paradigm of ‘modern geography’ that addressed the spatial system and hierarchy and its temporal processes.

## Keywords

geographical thought; paradigm; translation; modern German geography

## 1. Introduction

Most geographers would think that ‘quantitative and theoretical revolution’ changed the paradigm of ‘classic modern geography’ and that ‘New Geography’ was established as ‘spatial science’ during the 1950s (Cresswell 2024). We would understand that this ‘New Geography’ was criticized by Marxian or critical and humanist geographers since the second half of the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s, and fierce disputes among them have led to the multiple paradigms in ‘contemporary geography’.

However, what is the paradigm of classic modern geography begun in the 19<sup>th</sup> century? The conceptions of Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859), Carl Ritter (1779-1859), Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904), and Paul Vidal de la Blache (1845-1918) have sometimes been understood

only in the context of ‘environmentalism’, that is to say, the opposition between ‘determinism’ and ‘possibilism’, and the research of ‘Landschaft morphologie’ (landscape morphology).

These understandings are not wrong. However, these have been criticized and revised by many geographers who belong to different historical and geographical, or various cultural, political, and social contexts. In Japan, there were a lot of translations and investigations on the plural histories of European geographical thoughts since the Meiji Restoration. Japanese modern academic geographies have been established under the strong influence of European geographies, in particular German geography. Japanese geographers have made these investigations crossing their own cultural, social, and academic context. I think these include the distinct and original interpretations

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on European geographies, but most of these articles were written by Japanese. Language barrier still prevents us from making the circulation and crossing of different knowledges and ideas.

In this paper, I present some interpretations on the works of Carl Ritter and Ernst Kapp by three Japanese geographers belonging to different generations.

Firstly, Saburo Noma (1912-1991) was the representative of the first generation of researchers on the history of European geographical thought. Noma (1963, 1979) described the formation of modern German geography from the beginning of the movement of 'Reine geographie' (pure geography).

Secondly, Keiichi Takeuchi (1932-2005) was engaged in social geography in Italian and Mediterranean World, and he also wrote many articles on the histories of geographical thoughts from the perspective of the articulation between academic and popular geographies. He was a former chairperson of the IGU commission of the history of geographical thought.

Finally, Tetsuya Hisatake (1947-2007) was one of leading cultural geographers, who researched the geographical and cartographical knowledges of North American indigenous people as well as the history of cultural geography, in particular Carl O. Sauer and his Berkeley School which was influenced by the ideas of German thinkers: Johann Gottfried Herder and Friedrich Ratzel.

## **2. Geographical science as spatial and temporal relationships and processes: The idea and method of 'Modern geography' by C. Ritter**

Noma (1963, 1979) and Takeuchi (1981) reconsidered the concept of 'Allgemeine vergleichende Geographie (general and comparative geography)' by Ritter. Noma pointed out that Ritter deliberately used the term of 'Geographischen Wissenschaft' to distinguish his new concept of geography from

the old type of 'Geographie' that was presented as random lists and miscellaneous descriptions of geographical phenomena in places and areas.

According to Noma, the movement of 'Reine Geographie' in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century had played an important role in making this new Geographischen Wissenschaft. Before this movement, the only *raison d'être* of geographical knowledge was useful for monarch, politician, merchant, and so on. Geography was a part of 'Staatenkunde' (the state or the political discipline). In Staatenkunde, a monarch assigned two elementary roles to geographers: one was setting and resetting the boundary among states; the other was collecting basic information in his territory. The state boundary had changed constantly due to war and political marriages. But with Reine Geographie, a new idea of boundary based on natural or physical conditions was introduced into geography to fix state boundary. Although the concept of natural boundary was very simple, it transformed the old 'feudal geography' into a 'scientific discipline'. Farinelli (1983, 1989) has a more radical way of thinking that Reine Geographie was the emergency of 'civil (bourgeois) geography' which tried to liberate geographers from the dominance of cartographic reasoning.

What is the basic idea of Ritter's 'Geographischen Wissenschaft'? Noma and Takeuchi mentioned that Ritter did not consider new geography as environmentalism and teleological or mythical cosmology. Ritter sought to study 'geographical individuals' and their positions on the surface of the earth by uncovering not only the general laws governing natural forces, but also those governing historical and cultural forces. Ritter designed scientific research of the system or 'Anordnung' (ordering) of spatial relations at various scales on the earth by the comparative and relational approach: the reciprocal relationships from 'das Einzelne' (Part) to 'das Ganze' (Whole) and from Whole to Parts. Ritter considered that these complex interrelationships had

hierarchical ones between part and whole in the nesting spatial scales.

However, Ritter divided a continent into its basic parts and structure by not economic, cultural (ethnic) and political unit, but the natural one. Can it be said that he did not hold an environmental determinist perspective? According to Takeuchi, although we may be able to recognize the limitation of this concept of regional division by natural elements, we should remember that Ritter had always criticized the subordination of geography to 'Staatenkunde'. Takeuchi estimates that his concept of regional unit was the basic method that could exclude the influence of Staatenkunde from his Geographischen Wissenschaft.

In fact, Ritter was also interested in the change of traffic routes and means, and the impacts of its historical development on the relationships among the continents or places on the Earth. Ritter thought that these relationships never fixed permanently and always changed. For example, he mentioned if the isthmus of Suez or Panama was dug in the future, this project could change the spatial relations in the world and the position of Europa could become more prominent, because Europa occupied favorable position to connect with all other regions in the world easily. Takeuchi thought that the transformations of time-space relations or the relativity of space-time were the main topic in Ritter's geography.

Ritter's basic conception has been misunderstood or disregarded due to his difficult ideas and mistranslations. Takeuchi pointed out Élisée Reclus, the French translator of Ritter's work, might not understand the perspective of the complex interrelations between Whole and Parts. Therefore, Takeuchi evaluated that Reclus had trivialized the conception of 'räumliche Anordnung' by Ritter to simple environmentalism.

### 3. The conception of cultural geography by Ernst Kapp

Ernst Kapp may have been forgotten as a geographer. In Japanese academic world in the 1950s, the work of Kapp was recognized as the philosophy of modern technology, but any Japanese philosophers did not take any notice of the aspect of Kapp as a geographer. However, Noma (1963) pointed out that the position of Kapp was peripheral among Ritter's successors, but his work (1845) was very famous and popular in his time, because it could connect the ideas of Hegel and those of Ritter. Hisatake (2000) also pointed out that it was in this book that Kapp coined the term of 'Culturgeographie'.

His book was constructed by three parts: Die physische geographie, Die politische geographie, and Die culturgeographie. While the part of political geography made up more than half of this work, the number of pages of cultural geography was relatively small. Kapp's political geography was very known by European intellectual. For example, he had influenced the ideas of land power and sea power by Carl Schmitt (1954). Claude Raffestin (1995) regarded the work of Kapp as 'missing link' between Ritter's Erdkunde and Ratzel's Politische geographie.

When the German revolution begun in 1848, Kapp went into exile to the America continent. This experience as an exile brought new ideas to Kapp. He wrote second edition of his book (1868) whose contents were rather different from first one. According to Hisatake, while the part of political geography of Kapp's book was strongly influenced by the world view of Hegel or his philosophy of world history, the part of cultural geography showed his position as Hegel's leftist group, including Karl Marx. Hisatake (2000) thought that the ideological position of Kapp was closer to Marx than Hegel. His cultural geography was largely divided into two parts: 'Die Geographie der Raumkultur' (geography of space-culture) and 'Die

geographie der Zeitcultur' (geography of time-culture).

In the part of space-culture Kapp (1845: 365, translated by author) introduced the key concept of 'Arbeit' (Labor) into cultural geography:

Die Arbeit ist die Seele der Cultur. Die Cultur füllt die Kluft zwischen Natur und Geist, sie ist die ewige Brücke zwischen der Materie und den Gedanken. In der Cultur kommt durch den Menschen die Natur zu sich, und erhält mittels seiner Thätigkeit und Arbeit ihre Vollendung. Die Arbeit macht den Menschen wahrhaft zum Herren der Wirklichkeit.

(Labor is the mind of culture. Culture fills the gap between nature and mind, it is eternal bridge between the material and the thought. Nature becomes culture through human being and is granted completeness by his activity and labor. Labor makes men the true master of reality.)

Hisatake considered that Kapp could overcome a kind of idealism including Ritter's thought and re-interpret the traditional concept of landscape by the concept of labor and property, and his cultural geography tried to explore new approach between human activity and natural environment beyond idealism. However, Kapp remained optimistic about the industrialization of the world (Schultz 1996), and did not address problems such as the alienation of labor that was a unique issue to the modern world which Marx discussed in the *Capital*.

In the part of time-culture, Kapp's one of the main concepts was 'Die Verklärung der Natur durch den Geist in der größtmöglichen Tilgung der Raum= und Zeitspatien' (the transfiguration of nature by mind in the full annihilation of space and time) (Kapp 1845: 31). While this annihilation was achieved by various means including machine (internal combustion engine, telegraph, telephone), language and mind, Kapp regarded mind as the most important means. Hisatake thought that this problematic was connected to 'faux frais' in distribution costs by Marx and 'time-space compression' by David

Harvey (1989). It seems that Kapp developed Ritter's ideas of the relative space-time to discuss the particular impulse of modern capitalist world. However, this problematic was not necessarily taken over the works of Friedrich Ratzel who was interested in the movements of ethnic and animal groups.

#### 4. Concluding Remarks

Noma, Takeuchi and Hisatake tried to provide an alternative way of reading about Ritter and Kapp by reconsidering some central concepts of modern geography which were ignored by many geographers. They can bring Ritter and Kapp to life as the predecessors of contemporary geography. How can they do their alternative reading of these classic works? In addition to their deep knowledges and understandings about European culture, history, and society, the peripheral position and context of Japanese geographers may enable them to read these works in a way that is different from the European tradition.

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