

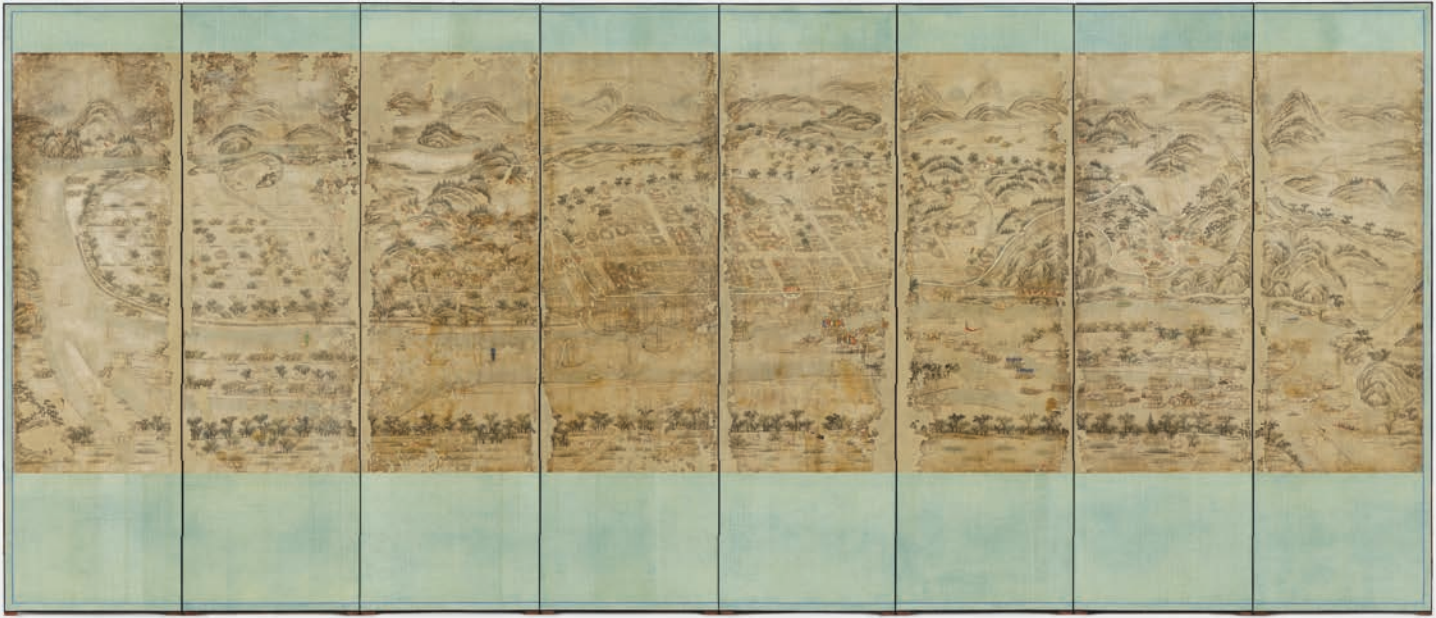
THE SHAPE OF THE LAND

TOPOGRAPHICAL PAINTING AND MAPS IN LATE JOSEON KOREA



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PORTLAND ART MUSEUM, OREGON



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1 detail

The special installation *The Shape of the Land* is inspired by one of the most important Korean works in the Museum's collection, an eight-panel folding screen depicting a bird's-eye view of the city of Pyeongyang, the present-day capital of North Korea. The screen was donated to the Museum in 2003 by the Oregon Korea Foundation, and in 2011 it was cleaned and restored with funding from the Korean National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage. The Pyeongyang screen is complemented and placed in context by maps and atlases of the late Joseon period (1392–1910), all on loan from the Robert and Sandra Mattielli Collection, which offer rich insights into how Koreans understood their environment at the time.

Cityscapes, combining the utilitarian function of a map with the artistic allure of landscape painting, came into vogue in Korea during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the rise

of urban culture and mobility. These paintings generally depict urban centers from a distant and elevated viewpoint, with specific geographical features and major architectural monuments identified by name. Less commonly, painters added glimpses of local customs as well. The walled city of Pyeongyang in northern Korea was among the most popular subjects in this new genre. To meet the high demand, a woodblock print attributed to the famous painter Kim Hong-do 김홍도 金弘道 (1745–1806?), which captured the explicit features of the city, was circulated widely. A large-scale work in folding screen format, it was reprinted and copied many times, establishing the standard composition for views of Pyeongyang, which is reflected in the Museum's painting. The walled city and its immediate environs are portrayed in a panoramic view on screens of eight, ten, or

twelve folding panels; from right to left are the northern, inner, middle, and outer keeps, with the Daedong River running along the city wall.

Pyeongyang's special appeal can be attributed to many factors. First, it is Korea's most ancient city, with origins dating back to prehistoric times. It served as the capital of Gojoseon (Old Joseon, ?–108 BCE), the first Korean state; the Goguryeo dynasty (37 BCE–668 CE), a major power in East Asia whose territory extended far into present-day Manchuria, Mongolia, and Russia; and the Western Capital of the Goryeo (918–1392) dynasty. And while one of the Korean origin myths claims that Gojoseon was established in 2333 BCE by Dangun, offspring of a heavenly prince and a bear-woman, another relates that a certain Gija 기자箕子 (Ch. Jizi), a member of the royal family of the Shang dynasty (ca. 1600–ca. 1046 BCE) in China, founded the state of Gija Joseon in the twelfth century BCE. The founders of the Joseon dynasty, whose own power base was in the northern part of Korea, regarded Pyeongyang as the source of Korean civilization; that attitude was revived during the eighteenth century as part of a surge in national pride. Second, Pyeongyang's proximity to the border with China has made it a hub for diplomacy and trade, which in turn gave rise to a flourishing literary and artistic culture, with distinctive cuisine and *gisaeng* female entertainers. Finally, the Neo-Confucian scholars of the Joseon period looked to Pyeongyang as the source of Confucian teachings in Korea.

One of the most dramatic aspects of the Museum's screen of Pyeongyang is the inclusion of the boating procession of the governor of Pyeong'an Province along the Daedong River. Aristocrats and commoners alike enjoyed this grand festival, where a flotilla of boats carry the governor and officials, escorted by a military retinue, upriver toward the city gate. Along the way, they are welcomed by officials and *gisaeng* lining the riverbank. We also catch glimpses of everyday life, such as ordinary people sailing boats on the river and peasant women washing their clothes.

Maps and atlases, topographical paintings with more utilitarian purpose than large-scale screen paintings, were widely produced in the late Joseon period. Initially, the government was the primary patron for such works, making use of maps for regional administration and defense. Painters were dispatched to the provinces to record features of local geography, and their work was compiled into atlases in the capital. In time, however, books of maps found a large audience among the general population as well.

As an example of the kinds of information collected and distributed in government-issued maps, a map book in the Mattielli collection (no. 4) shows for each of eight provinces the major



1 detail

towns, color-coded by hierarchies of significance, and the distance between them. Provincial capitals are indicated by red cartouches in the shape of a toothed wheel.

An interesting feature of Korean maps is the emphasis placed on mountains. As mountain ranges cover more than two-thirds of the peninsula, mountains have always figured prominently in Korean life, both in practical, logistical matters and in the realms of myth and imagination. Mountains are considered the habitat of good spirits, whose energy emanates through the surrounding countryside. In maps, accordingly, mountains are usually depicted as arteries and rivers as veins that together constitute the whole body of the peninsula. In a map of Korea from an untitled atlas in the Mattielli collection (no. 2), mountain ranges cover the peninsula, and several of them are depicted with distinct topographical features. Mount Baekdu (White Head Mountain), for example, the largest and most sacred mountain in Korea, is depicted as the largest and white in color, while Mount Geumgang (Diamond Mountain) is painted with stylized diamond shapes.

In many atlases, the sequence of maps begins with a view of the world, followed by maps of China, Korea, the eight provinces of Korea, and foreign countries. The map of the world in the exhibition (no. 14), reflects a uniquely Korean world view: it portrays a world comprised of four concentric realms, with China at the center and Joseon on the right edge of the inner continent.

Many place names are imaginary, derived from *Shanhaijing* 山海經 (Classic of Mountains and Seas), a Chinese mythic geography compiled in the third century BCE. This type of world map remained popular during the late Joseon period even after Western geographical knowledge was introduced to Korea.

To Koreans, land is not just an asset or property; it is where the past, present, and future co-exist and where ancestral spirits reside. Although maps and topographical paintings served utilitarian functions to the degree that they conveyed factual data, in the

choice of subjects, artistic style, and compositional emphases, they provide valuable information on how Koreans of the late Joseon period perceived, interpreted, and shaped their surroundings.

The Museum is deeply grateful to the Oregon Korea Foundation for donating the Pyeongyang screen in 2003 and for supporting the companion brochure for this exhibit. Our thanks also to Sandra and Robert Mattielli for their generous loans.

Organized by the Portland Art Museum and curated by Sangah Kim, Cowles Curatorial Fellow in Asian Art.





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CHECKLIST

1. The Walled City of Pyongyang

평양성도 平壤城圖
Korea, unknown artist
Joseon period (1392–1910), 19th century
Eight-panel screen; ink and color on paper
61 x 142
Gift of the Oregon Korea Foundation, 2003.23

2. Map of Korea from an untitled atlas of Korea

아국지형도 我國地形圖
Korea, unknown artist
Late Joseon period (1392–1910), probably
19th century
From a book of folded maps; ink and color on paper

11 ¹⁵/₁₆ x 12 ⁵/₈

The Robert and Sandra Mattielli Collection,
L2018.35.7

3. Map of Korea from an untitled atlas of Korea

동국지형도 東國地形圖
Korea, unknown artist
Late Joseon period (1392–1910), probably
19th century
From a book of folded maps; ink on paper sized
with persimmon tannin
20 ¹/₄ x 13 ⁵/₁₆
The Robert and Sandra Mattielli Collection,
L2018.35.5

4. Map of Gyeongsang Province from Atlas of

the Eight Provinces of Korea
대한팔도지도: 경상도 지도
大韓八道紙圖: 慶尙道地圖
Korea, unknown artist
Late Joseon period (1392–1910), probably
19th century
From a book of folded maps; ink and color on
paper
13 x 12 ¹⁵/₁₆
The Robert and Sandra Mattielli Collection,
L2018.35.6

5 **Maps of Pyeongyang** from *Korean Atlas*

여도총람: 평양폭원총도
輿圖總覽: 平壤幅員總圖

Korea, unknown artist

Late Joseon period (1392–1910), probably
19th century

From a book of maps; ink and color on paper
11 5/8 x 13

The Robert and Sandra Mattielli Collection,
L2018.35.2

6 **Map of Japan and Ryukyu Islands** from *Atlas of the World*

천하대관: 일본도·류큐국도
天下大觀: 日本圖·琉球國圖

Korea, unknown artist

Late Joseon period (1392–1910), probably
19th century

From a book of maps; ink and color on paper
19 1/4 x 24

The Robert and Sandra Mattielli Collection,
L2018.35.1

7 **Map of Korea**

조선도 朝鮮圖

Korea, unknown artist

Late Joseon period (1392–1910), probably
19th century

Ink and color on paper
17 1/2 x 13 1/8

The Robert and Sandra Mattielli Collection,
L2018.35.9

8 **Map of Korea**

조선지도 朝鮮地圖

Korea, unknown artist

Late Joseon period (1392–1910), probably
19th century

Ink and color on paper
43 x 24 1/8

The Robert and Sandra Mattielli Collection,
L2018.35.12

9 **Map of Gyeongsang Province**

경상도 지도 慶尙道地圖

Korea, unknown artist

Late Joseon period (1392–1910), probably
19th century

Ink and color on paper
47 1/4 x 35

The Robert and Sandra Mattielli Collection,
L2018.35.14

10 **Map of Mountains of Gyeongsang Province**

경상도 산세도 慶尙道山勢圖

Korea, unknown artist

Late Joseon period (1392–1910), probably
19th century

Ink and color on paper
67 1/4 x 49 1/2

The Robert and Sandra Mattielli Collection,
L2018.35.11

11 **Map of Yeong'il County**

영일현읍기중도 迎日縣邑基摠圖

Korea, unknown artist

Late Joseon period (1392–1910), probably
19th century

Ink and color on paper
40 7/16 x 40 3/16

The Robert and Sandra Mattielli Collection,
L2018.35.13



14 detail

12 **Graveyard in Seoul**

산도 山圖

Korea, unknown artist

Late Joseon period (1392–1910), probably
19th century

Ink and color on paper

12 7/8 x 14 7/16

The Robert and Sandra Mattielli Collection,
L2018.35.15

13 **Map of Seoul**

Attributed to Kim Jeong-ho (Korean, 1804?–
1866?)

전 김정호 수선전도 傳金正浩 首善全圖

Joseon period (1392–1910), original woodblock

1840s; impression, late 20th century

Woodblock print on paper

61 3/16 x 34 7/16

Private Collection, L2018.49.1

14 **Map of the World and Map of China**

천하총도·중국도 天下總圖·中國圖

Korea, unknown artist

Late Joseon period (1392–1910), probably
19th century

Eight-panel screen; ink and light color on paper

30 1/2 x 15 3/8 (each panel)

The Robert and Sandra Mattielli Collection,
L2018.35.8

15 **The Great Ming Atlas of Mountains and Seas**

대명일통산하폭원도 大明一統山河幅員圖

Korea, unknown artist

Late Joseon period (1392–1910), after 1865

Ink and color on paper

44 1/8 x 41 1/2

The Robert and Sandra Mattielli Collection,
L2018.35.10

*An inscription on the painting indicates that it
was given by the painter Old Man Jeom to his
grandson in the year 1865.*

Cover Image: 1 detail

All dimensions are in inches with height followed
by width.