Regional Studies in Intercultural Communication: The Perception of Space and Space Consciousness in the Context of Geographical Considerations

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Introduction

When one thinks of non-verbal communication, what likely first comes to mind is gestures, body movements, facial expression, and perhaps dress, but different perceptions of space consciousness also affects communications and alterations to communication based on the perception of space in any individual culture. In addition to these more obvious forms of non-verbal communication, aspects of the perception of time or perception of space also vary according to culture and can effect both communication within any individual culture as well as affect issues of communication across cultures. Previously in another essay, "Regional Studies in Intercultural Communication: The American and Japanese Perception of Time" (2012), I considered the differences in the perception of time and time consciousness by comparing them in two cultures, and here I would like to continue the topic of "Regional Studies in Intercultural Communication" by considering different aspects of the perception of space and space consciousness and how these effect, affect, and relate to different modes of communication across cultures. Both the previous essay and this current one are based on class lectures for the course "Introduction to Intercultural Communication," which I taught from 2012 to 2015 at Atomi Women's University.

In the present essay here, I will address the perception of space and space consciousness in the specific context of geography, including the topics: different versions of world maps and how they effect the perception of the world and its nations; how the space consciousness effects the perception of distance; and how the spatial layouts of different cities (Manhattan, Kyoto, and Tokyo) affect the perception of space, space consciousness, and concomitant communication.

World Maps and Space Consciousness

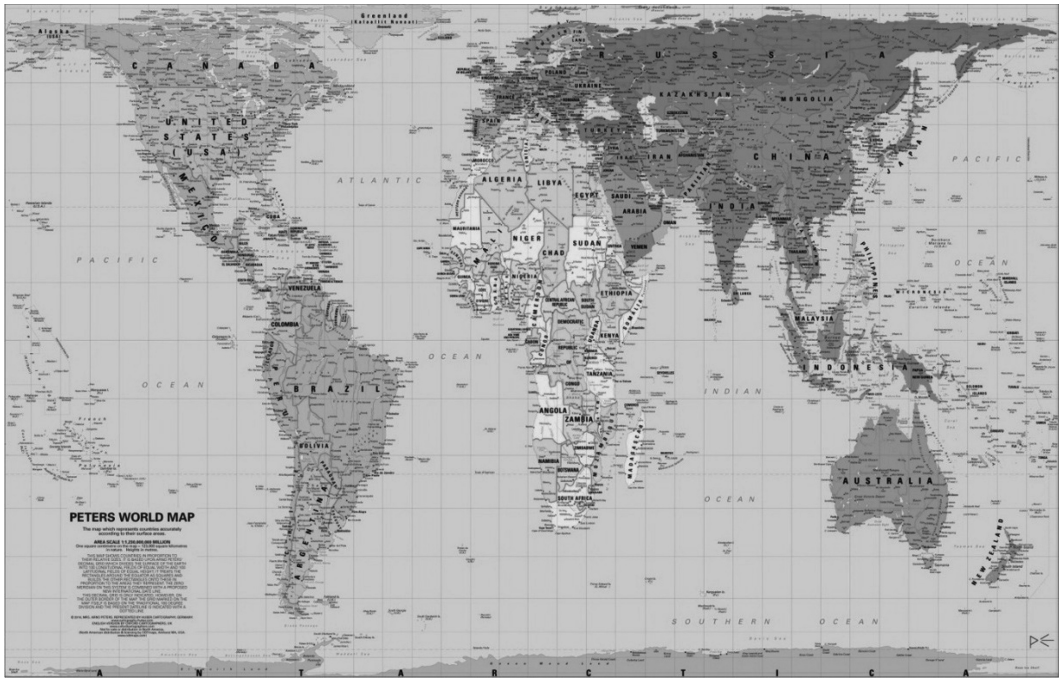
"Maps not only represent the world, they shape the way we see it."[1] Places thought of in terms of geography as a physical entity with maps and known mileage and distances may at first glance seem to be counterintuitive to imagine how differences in perceptions might occur. An obvious example of space perception of geography can be seen in the differences of various world maps. World maps typically place the northern hemisphere at the top and so accentuate the northern hemisphere and visually diminish the significance of the southern hemisphere located at the

1 Oxford Cartographers "The Peters Projection Map" (accessed 2019-01-20)
https://www.oxfordcartographers.com/our-maps/peters-projection-map/

UN logo. United Nations

lower half of the map. The United Nation's logo is based on the azimuthal polar projection, placing the North Pole at the center and in which the lower hemisphere would actually be hidden. Although the earlier 1945 version of the UN logo made North America prominent, the next year its location on the logo was neutralized by centralizing on the International Date Line. Global maps may also either center on the Atlantic ocean emphasizing the Americas and Europe, or be centered on the pacific ocean used more commonly in East Asian and Oceanic countries. Placing north at the top or centralizing on any portion of the globe is only a matter of convention, but the choices made are indicative of the invested interests of political and social powers in grounding the importance of certain parts of the globe.

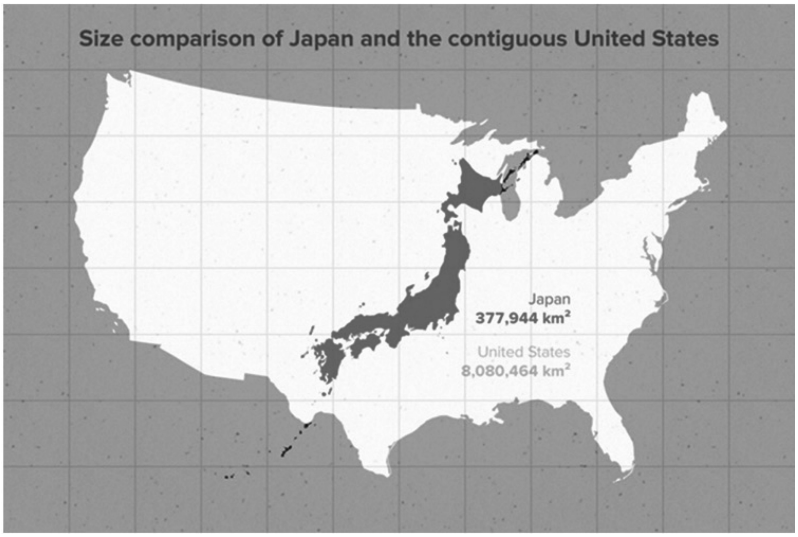
Moreover, the exigencies of flattening the globe to make a two-dimensional map by necessity creates distortion in the depiction of the globe; as a result many maps make some lands like Greenland appear disproportionately larger and other lands like Africa become disproportionately smaller (Africa is actually 14 times the size of Greenland). One of the standard world maps, often used in public schools in the US, is the Mercator projection map. The Mercator map was first designed in 16th century Flanders by the cartographer Gerardus Mercator so it could be accurately used to calculate compass bearings for navigational purposes (by mapping "rhumb lines," sailing courses on the sphere, to straight lines on the plane map). Maps based on the Mercator projection can be seen as problematic because of the exaggeration of the size and the centralization of developed Western nations at the expense of less developed countries, and indeed the first world maps based on it were produced by European colonialists. In 2017, the Boston public school system switched from the Mercator projection to using the Peters Projection Map, which has the advantage that all countries are depicted in correct in size in relation to each other (although it does distort the countries' shapes). A comparison of the two maps (Mercator projection top; Peters projection below) points out some of the political and social implications of how the world is portrayed in global maps.



While the well-known example above of the political and social implications of global maps and the import of space consciousness (how it affects space perception) in the context of geography is relatively apparent, there are other more obtuse differences in space consciousness and their

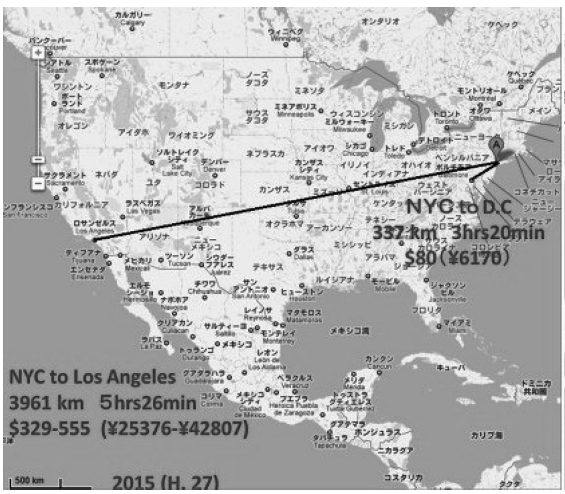
effects.

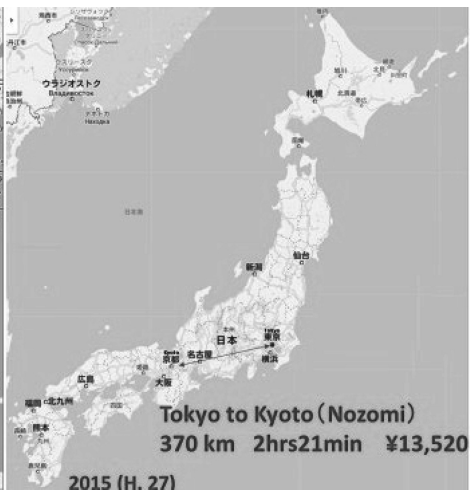
Perceptions of Space and Distance



More than twenty years ago, when I first came to Japan, a question I was frequently asked was did I find Japan to be a narrow country; narrow in this context meaning small and confined in space compared to the US. And, in all truth I did not, likely because of a difference in perceiving or defining space. Japan is roughly about 1/25th of the size of the US, and approximately the size of California. Nor did I find Japanese houses particularly small or confining, but that is the subject of a following topic.

How does one measure space or distance? Is it a matter of mileage or how many kilometers? Or how long it takes to get there? Or how much it costs to get there? Or even, how easy it is to get there. Let's consider these questions.

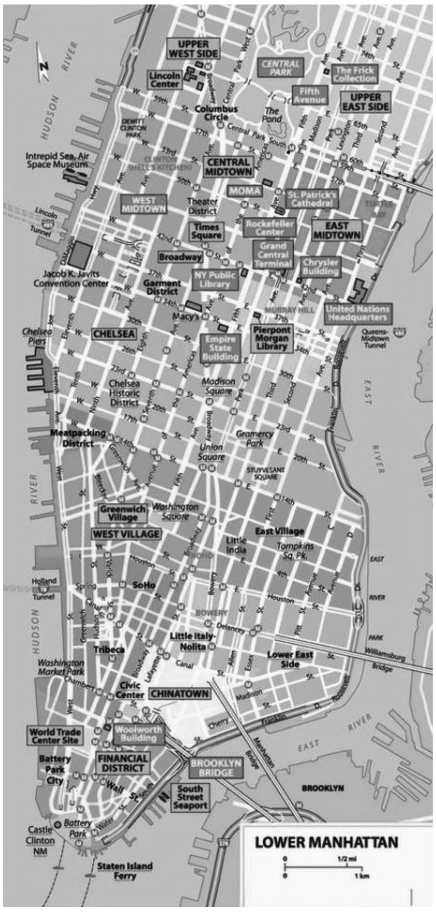




Comparing travel to and from Tokyo and Kyoto with travel to and from NYC and D.C. (based on 2015 information), Tokyo–Kyoto is farther in kilometers, an hour shorter in time (USA Amtrak vs Japan Shinkansen), but more than twice as much in price. In other words, Tokyo–Kyoto, despite being a slightly further distance, is closer in time, but twice as far in cost. Comparing then Tokyo –Kyoto to NYC–LA, NYC–LA is more than ten times as far, but only three hours longer (USA plane vs Japan Shinkansen), and can be less than twice as much in price. So again, NYC–LA is ten times as far in kilometers, but less than three times as far in time, and less than two times as far in cost. Travel in the USA is fast and comparatively cheap, making it seem smaller in travel time and expense, and Japan actually much smaller in kilometers is comparatively much larger in time and expense. Although the typical and more obvious perception is that the US is much larger than Japan, but Japan may seem much larger than one would think when one has less time and money to spare. In the end, how one perceives space can depend on issues of cost and speed rather than the literal geographic distance.

The Perception of Space: Towns and Addresses

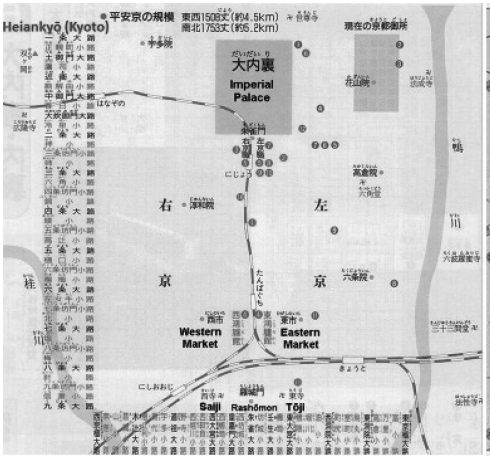
The layout of a city can affect not only perception of space but also communication concerning location. In NYC, one typically gives directions with “up” or “down” and “west” or “east;” in Kyoto, typically“up” or “down” and “west” or “east” (although some would say “north” or “south” and “west” or “east;” and in Tokyo, “up” or “down” and “left” or “right.” Let’s take a look at what generates these differences, and how space perception can influence communication.

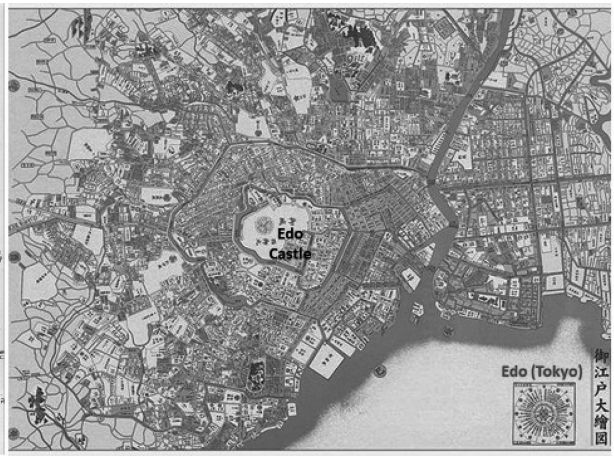


Manhattan is laid out on a grid pattern, with the Hudson River bordering on the west side and the East River bordering on the east side. The streets from 59th and up are “uptown,” the streets from 59th to 23rd/25th “midtown,” the streets from 23rd/25th to 14th may be perceived as either “midtown” or “downtown,” but the streets from 14th on down are indisputably “downtown.” Central Park splits the middle of uptown, and to the west of the park is the Upper West Side and to the east is the Upper East Side, both of which have a reputation for being posh, (although above Central Park is Harlem—quite the opposite). Below Central park starts midtown, west of Broadway (which runs diagonally north to south through Manhattan) is West Midtown, from Broadway to 5th Avenue is Central Midtown, and east of 5th Ave is East Midtown. Roads go-

ing east–west are called Streets, and moving along on them you are going “crosstown;” roads going north–south are called Avenues, and on them you are going “uptown” or “downtown.” The West Village (Greenwich Village) is west of Broadway between 14th and Houston (pronounced “HOW–stən”,) and the East Village is east of Broadway between 14th and Houston. Below the West Village west of Broadway is SoHo (south of Houston) and east of it is the Lower East Side. There are also a number of other neighborhood names necessary to know in order to get around Manhattan with ease.

Kyoto is likewise laid out in a grid pattern, with the imperial palace located in the north–center, a wide central boulevard leading from it to the southern Roshōmon Gate dividing the capital into east and west, and with evenly intersecting streets running north–south and west–east which form blocks of rows numbered from one in the north to nine in the south. Although it was actually its predecessor the Nara capital of Heijōkyō that was based on the Chinese Tang dynasty capital of Xian, Kyoto, established in 794 by Emperor Kanmu, was also planned according to Chinese *Feng Shui* geomancy, built on a broad plain surrounded by mountains on three sides and a body of water to the south, a river on either side, and two temples in the southern ninth ward spiritually guarding the southern gate to the east (Tōji temple) and west (Saiji temple). Although the city has shifted to the east with development since then, the grid layout still predominates the city even now.





Tokyo, on the other hand, established as the eastern capital by the shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu in 1603, was laid out in a circular pattern centered on the Edo castle. The entire complex of the castle consisted of a number of enclosures encircled by a series of moats in a spiral pattern, outside the central castle area was a ward dedicated to the residences of upper ranking samurai, and this two was encircled by a ring of waterways, and the town was further protected by the Sumidagawa river and the Edo bay on the east. The uptown (*yamanote*) of Edo was located in the outer circle around the castle grounds and was a posh area were the upper ranking samurai had their private estates; the downtown (*shitamachi*) was located on the eastern side of the city where the com-

moners made up of merchants, laborers, and artisans lived.

The town of Edo was further surrounded by four major gateways of inns just outside the city that formed boisterous little towns in themselves. While the five major roadways of the Tokugawa period all had their starting points at Nihonbashi, these highways also had major stations with inns outside the city proper: the Tōkaidō had the Shinagawa–shuku station, the Kōshūkaidō had Naitō–shinjuku, the Nakasendō had Itabashi–shuku, the Ōshūkaidō and Nikkōkaidō shared the Senju–shuku. These highway outposts eventually became part of Tokyo, and combined with the wards that surrounded Edo castle, Tokyo became a conglomerate of several smaller units of neighborhoods. As a result, addresses of locations in Tokyo instead of being a unit on a street like in Manhattan or Kyoto, are circled in upon in the order of ward name, neighborhood name, block of neighborhood, unit within neighborhood block, and finally number of the building. The numbers are not only more circular rather than linear, in keeping with the general layout of Tokyo, but also go in the order of when the building was built. Finding places in Tokyo can indeed be a challenge.

The two very different layouts of Kyoto and Tokyo effect different perceptions of space, which in turn influence different ways of communication in the two cities. Let's look at two specific addresses one each in Kyoto and Tokyo respectively to see how the city layout and space perception effect communication in specifying a locale.

The two maps below show the Erishō Honten shop in Kyoto (left) and the Kururi shop in Tokyo (right).

On the left (Kyoto), the address of the Erishō Honten (あり正本店) shop is written as Kyōto–fu, Kyōto–shi, Nakagyō–ku, Teramachi–Shijō agaru (京都府京都市中京区寺町四条上がる), which means the shop is located in the Nakagyō ward of Kyoto city, going up the north–south Teramachi street from the east–west Shijō street.

In comparison, the address of the Kururi（くるり）shop in Tokyo（on the right）is Tōkyō-to, Shibuya-ku, Jingūmae, 4-chōme, 25-banme, ＃6（東京都渋谷区神宮前４丁目25－６）, which means the Kurui shop is located in the Shibuya ward of Tokyo, and within that the Jingūmae neighborhood, and within that the 4th section, and within that the 25th block, and within that the building is the 6th plot that was established. As can be see, in Kyoto you go up-down or cross-town much like as in Manhattan, which also had a grid plan, whereas in Tokyo you circle in to find the exact location. The two cities have each their own style of communicating addresses based on spatial perception formed by the different layouts of the two cities.

Conclusion

In this short essay, I have described, with specific examples, differences in space perception and how those differences can effect meaning and communication. First I addressed how differing versions, (“projections”), of world maps not only effect meaning but also have political and social consequences. Next, I discussed how perception of space is not merely a matter of geographic space or geometry, but is rather effected by one’s own consciousness of that space and can be perceived in numerous ways including not only the sense of distance（mileage or kilometers）, but also can be perceived in the sense of time（hours and minutes required）, or perceived in the sense of cost and expense（in addition to dollars or yen, there is also the expense of upkeep for a car and payments for toll roads etcetera）. Although I did not address it here, one might also consider the ease of transport in the context of the perception of space; certainly without a car and readily available public transportation surely places would feel harder to get to and hence more distant. Finally I considered how the layouts of different cities（Manhattan, Kyoto, and Tokyo）affect perceptions of space and effect differences in forms of communication. There are further aspects of the perception of space that I would have liked to have included such as how personal space differs between cultures and how that can affect cross-culture communication and also how space within a residence（for example the difference between a Western style house and a tradition Japanese style one）can effect both overall cultural differences and modes of communication, and other further topics concerning the perception of space and issues of communication. However, due to time and space limitations, these will have to be followed up in a later essay.

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