Introduction: World Knowledge and Non-European Space

Nineteenth Century Geography Textbooks and Children's Books

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In the nineteenth century, transmitting knowledge of the world became one of the most important tasks for education. As the last blank spots on the map were filled in, geographical knowledge assumed particular importance. In order to do business, assess political situations, and make travel plans, young adults had to learn more than etiquette, manners, religion and history. This knowledge of the world was conveyed to minors primarily via pedagogical instruction (for example, by way of geography textbooks), but also via adventure stories and travel novels.

For authors of both genres, it was of the utmost importance that their young readers not only learn facts and figures, but also form an impression of different spaces and peoples. It was this growing concern that led to the academic revolution in geography, out of which emerged Carl Ritter's famous definition of geography as the "science of space" and of history as the "science of time."¹ This period also saw a change in learning spaces. New schools were constructed in architectural styles that symbolized the new learning. The state asserted its control of the educational system in various ways. In Turkey, as Benjamin Fortna demonstrates, it replaced older religious schools with new secular buildings, while in Prussia it constructed a uniform type of new school building throughout the territory.² For the modern state, the control of space became a central concern in both a territorial and psychological sense.

This special issue seeks to illuminate, from various perspectives, how turn-of-the-century textbooks and novels reflected the dominant Eurocentric perspectives on defining space (especially non-European space) and contemporary attitudes toward describing the world in geographical and anthropological terms. To demonstrate the similarities and differences between "modern" nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century educational programs, we have collected examples from the German Empire, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Turkey, the United States, Bengal at the time of British India, and Japan. Since geography was the primary source of learning for children (in the metropolis but

also in the colonies or elsewhere) about economies, political relations, resources, and emigration, this discipline became an important context for the framing of knowledge of the “self” and the “other.” Geography therefore became one of the central channels for the propagation of knowledge about the world. Geographical congresses and conferences also contributed toward this aim.³ Paradoxically, during the nineteenth century this process of transmitting geographical knowledge became spatially concentrated, that is, it became an urban phenomenon in keeping with the image of the city as the hub of modernity.⁴ Museums and zoos, circuses and parks, commercial buildings and monuments representing (and in some cases consisting of) foreign possessions became the new settings for gaining knowledge about the world.⁵

Many countries, however, lacked a neutral agency via which to transmit knowledge of this new geography. For geographers in the German Reich, for example, the discipline’s most valuable contribution lay in its potential to imbue their country’s future citizens with a belief in colonialism and imperialism. Geographers used colonialism as a topic that could bring the new discipline funding and recognition. In Germany, Ferdinand von Richthofen propagated German colonial engagement in China.⁶ It is for this reason that Gerhard Sandner and Mechthild Rössler speak of geography as having created “a continuous and deep-seated language”⁷ for German imperialism:

In school geography, meanwhile, colonial issues figured in the fight for a greater role for geographical teaching. The 1892 reformed curriculum for secondary schools included colonial themes, but continued demands by geographers for a specific teaching area (*Kolonialkunde*) were not immediately effective. This changed, however, when the Reichstag initiated a more coherent and dynamic colonial policy in 1906, reflecting the growing economic importance of the colonies. Colonial education was immediately intensified, combining economic and commercial geography with nationalist colonial policies.⁸

Since school geography was a relatively new discipline, the authors of the first geography textbooks were often prominent scholars and highly influential in academic organizations.⁹ This dialogue between scholarship and education is especially revealing given that, although it aspired to scientific objectivity, the new discipline was deeply intertwined with the colonial project. This ambivalence in approach defined in “neutral” terms an imperial project that was still being hotly disputed (as were the scientific approaches to “measuring” the world), and thereby created a new space for “imaginary geographies” that children and young adults could fill in on their own.¹⁰ Therefore, this volume is consistent insofar as it considers various media (and spaces) in its analysis of contemporary

debates on the shape of the world, thereby allowing us to construct a broader discursive frame.

We may safely assume that the children who read these books to learn from them did not care about the authors' hidden intentions. For them, it did not matter whether someone used adventure stories to convey information about the colonies and encourage colonial settler migration, or whether (like Karl May) they used realistic-sounding landscapes as an excuse to tell a moral tale (and make money in the process).¹¹ In examples of the former case, one may detect residual romantic educational ideals of the Enlightenment propagated by pedagogues and geographers around 1800, which are evident in the writings of Carl Ritter, who drew a parallel between exploring the world and the very process of growing up.¹²

Lessons about the "Other" in Geography

The notion that geography lessons, and especially classroom wall maps, had the potential to fire pupils' imaginations is best documented in the British context¹³ in debates about what Edward Said has called "imagined geography." Said noted that "throughout human history, geographical imaginings of distant and different Others have been employed to both rationalize and frame the waging of wars."¹⁴ As hopes for gaining wealth in distant lands fostered the age of discovery, fantasies about other countries and peoples could be transformed into action, and were quite often connected to the proverbial maps on the classroom wall.

To this end, beginning in the late eighteenth century, various methods were employed to teach children geographical knowledge with special regard to its usefulness. In 1790s England, for example, authors began disseminating their narratives (supplemented with additional information that they regarded as useful for children) not only via geography textbooks, but also with the help of games and puzzles,¹⁵ establishing a tradition that was to continue well into the twentieth century. At the end of the nineteenth century, the use of board games and toys to spread knowledge of the world became popular in Germany as well, where such games were also used to teach children about the German colonies.¹⁶

Common to all the countries examined in this volume was their need to develop a new understanding of their own space, both as independent nation-states and in terms of their places in the world. Nineteenth-century debates on German nationalism focused mostly on the question of whether the planned nation-state would be "lesser German" (*kleindeutsch*) or "greater German" (*großdeutsch*). While the German unification of 1871 reflected the ideals of the propagandists of the "lesser German" solution, the Reich was shaped both by its geographical borders to the

east and west and by the issue of the German colonies. For the Netherlands, the beginning of the twentieth century saw the last big extension of its colonial states in the Indonesian archipelago. Aceh became Dutch in 1912, and the last Balinese kingdom was conquered in 1908. The contrary is true in the case of Turkey. When the Ottoman Empire collapsed, the Republic of Turkey controlled only the landmass of Asia Minor. British India was part of an immense empire, but the 1905 partition had important repercussions for Bengali (and Indian) nationalism. At the same time, Japan shifted from an isolated island empire to a colonial power, developing concepts like the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, which paved the way for its conquests during the Second World War. Finally, the United States also developed a plan for ordering the world, that is, the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 and Jackson Turner's concept of the "frontier," which was elucidated in 1893.

In addition to these similarities, there were also significant differences between Western and Asian descriptions of the world. In Asian textbooks, the paradigm of "Western" modernism played various changing roles. This problem was not only inherent in the description of the world and the natural environment familiar to non-European children,¹⁷ it was also extant in the conflict (present in many colonial adventure stories) between an environment described as perilous and the goal to instil in (male) children the will to go abroad, become colonial officers, and serve the colonial "civilizing mission."¹⁸ The tension was largely solved by way of adventure stories, and this may be a reason why war stories take up so much space in geography textbooks. Historical and cultural studies have often acknowledged how this binarity between the "civilized" Western and the "uncivilized" non-Western world created dichotomies and alterities by positively emphasizing the European and denigrating the non-European. But as the articles in this volume demonstrate, these dichotomies between "home" and "abroad" were incorporated into non-European texts as well.

The Content of This Special Issue

Most of the articles in this volume focus less on the extent to which geography lessons contributed to the perpetuation of colonial domination, and more on the nature of their descriptions of the world and of the knowledge they were meant to communicate to their young readers.

The articles thus suggest a broad definition of the term "space," which is understood as referring both to new physical spaces to discover (on earth and in outer space) and to new spheres of knowledge. The articles consequently broaden their scope of inquiry to include, in addition to geography textbooks, children's and youth literature and

architectural aspects of school buildings. The articles thereby overcome the problem of historical context, namely, that a given colonial textbook was written by and for a particular colonial administration. In order to analyze Indian conceptions of space, for example, one has to consider other material and everyday debates about space. Another example is the case of the Netherlands, where juvenile literature was seen as a medium to influence and “educate” pupils both from the Netherlands proper and the Netherlands Indies.

While attempting to overcome nineteenth-century Eurocentric perspectives, this volume nevertheless takes European textbooks as its starting point. Beginning with an examination of the debates surrounding the Wilhelmine Empire and its idiosyncratic East Asian discourse in German geography textbooks, the volume then explores the Dutch approach to the Netherlands Indies as an example of a specific modernistic approach to colonial rule. Turkey features as one of the most radical examples of educational reform in the twentieth century, as it transposed a European educational model onto a non-European one. Then, an analysis of the childhood memories of the Bengali elite offers insight into the daily life of Calcutta, one of the most important cities of the British Empire. The contribution on Japan again confronts us with German educational models that were interpreted in the context of the rising Japanese Empire. Closing the circle, geographically and figuratively, the final contribution presents an American perspective, examining the special place that Americans, in their search for a new identity that was distinct from their colonial legacy and that focused on the “New World,” claimed for themselves in an increasingly Westernized world. While the contributions emphasize the importance of schools in transmitting knowledge and new social norms, Benjamin C. Fortna and Gargi Gangopadhyay address school buildings as representations of the “architectural staging” of a new kind of learning and as part of a process of internalizing Western attitudes, the repercussions of which can be felt to this very day.

The volume starts with Germany because German geographers thought that they were at the head of the development of geography as a modern science. In “Reading East Asia in Schools of the Wilhelmine Empire,” Andreas Weiß examines how post-1871 German geography instruction, which was heavily influenced by Ferdinand von Richthofen and Friedrich Ratzel, demonstrated a clear affinity with colonial projects while at the same time framing geography as a modern discipline. This affinity with colonialism was demonstrably stronger in the realm of geography instruction than it was in that of history instruction, which was also nationalistic in character. By focusing on East Asia, Weiß examines an important aspect of the colonial geographical imagination of the time, but which now merits further research. His examples also demonstrate that the somewhat schizophrenic aim of many narratives about East Asia

was not only, or even not primarily, to teach something to educate pupils about East Asia, but rather to promote the German Empire and its position in the world.

In their contribution, “Are ‘the Natives’ Educable? Dutch School-children Learn Ethical Colonial Policy,” Elisabeth Wesseling and Jacques Dane examine Dutch colonial discourse about the Netherlands Indies at the turn of the twentieth century. In response to criticism of its colonial policy in the East Indies, the state introduced the so-called Ethical Policy (*ethische politiek*), which was itself later criticized by authors like Eduard Douwes Dekker, a former colonial civil servant better known as Multatuli. The official aim of this reform was to economically modernize the territory, especially Java, by way of a plantation economy system which required that Javanese farmers deliver a quota of natural products to the colonial state as a kind of tax, a system which in turn required more administrators and a re-education program for the colonial elite. Wesseling and Dane examine how Dutch textbooks of the period presented the interaction between “Whites” and “natives,” and assessed the potential of the Javanese natives to acquire an education.

In “Education and Change in the Late Ottoman Empire and Turkey: Space, Time, and Text,” Benjamin C. Fortna identifies similarities between two different educational systems. While the late Ottoman Empire in many ways laid the foundations for the educational reforms of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, it was the latter’s zealous striving to modernize rural Anatolian society that broke fundamentally with previous Turkish educational strategies. Yet the Young Turks, and later the Republic of Turkey, wanted not only to educate new, better citizens, but to use children to re-educate their parents in a process that saw the devaluation of formerly accepted connotations of “Turkishness.”

Next, Gargi Gangopadhyay examines the role of private space in “Imperialism and Nationhood in Children’s Books in Colonial Bengal.” In Calcutta, the former imperial capital of British India, reform-minded Bengalis mingled with a Western colonial elite that transformed both their lifestyles and worldviews. In this exchange, the contrast between village and city became a central issue. For earlier generations of the upper middle classes, memories of a traditional upbringing made life in the city unbearable; the village was imagined as a free space associated with an older, “Bengali” educational tradition. For later generations, by contrast, contact and interaction with Western educational norms had a liberating effect while at the same time reminding them of their place in colonial society.

Toshiko Ito’s contribution “Wandelnde Horizonte des Weltwissens: Zur Raumvorstellung der elementaren Geographieschulbücher des Japanischen Kaiserreichs” (Changing horizons of world knowledge: On the presentation of space in primary school geography textbooks of the

Japanese Empire) examines the geography textbook reform in Japan after the Meiji Restoration, which saw the introduction of modern, Western-style knowledge and descriptions of the world. Two German concepts thereby became important. These were the notion of “object lessons,” taken from Pestalozzi via an Americanized adaptation, and the concept of “earth spaces” (*Erdräume*), a term coined by Carl Ritter. These concepts were adapted to the Japanese Empire’s international policies, which were themselves shaped according to the shifting (liberal or nationalistic) tendencies in the national department of education. While the concept of homeland, or *Heimat*, and narratives about other continents were adapted to fit the imagined objectives of Japanese imperialism, the government’s attempts to control the content of the textbooks were occasionally impeded by the frequently changing production process, because time and again the liberal state left content and production to the publishers and failed to control them or offer them any guidelines.

Finally, in “Teaching National Identity and Alterity: Nineteenth Century American Primary School Geography Textbooks,” Bahar Gürsel focuses on the development of two prominent American geography textbooks before and after the Civil War. Not only did American exceptionalism become more important during this period, but the description of Native Americans also changed substantially. Also, landscape representations played a key role in the process of positioning the country in a projected civilizational hierarchy. American geography textbooks increasingly emphasized the unique, non-European trajectory of American social and economic development while at the same time presenting the United States as the new epitome of “Western civilization.”

Notes

1. Hans-Dietrich Schultz, “Fach unter Fächer oder was sonst? Eine disziplin-historische Skizze zur deutschen Geographie,” *Geographische Revue* 16, no. 1 (2014): 20–54, 29–30, 44–45.
2. Michael Luley, *Eine kleine Geschichte des deutschen Schulbaus: vom späten 18. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2000); Thomas Müller and Romana Schneider, *Das Klassenzimmer vom Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts bis heute* (Tübingen: Wasmuth, 2010).
3. Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994), 38; Heinz Peter Brogiato, “Die Schulgeographie im Spiegel der Deutschen Geographentage,” *Geographische Rundschau* 47, no. 9 (1995): 484–490. On the topic of imperialism and exhibitions, see Alexander Geppert, *Fleeting Cities: Imperial Expositions in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
4. Iris Schröder, *Das Wissen von der ganzen Welt: Globale Geographien und räumliche Ordnungen Afrikas und Europas 1790–1870* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2011).

5. Those monuments could be quite extravagant, one example being the public fountains in London that were financed by Indian princes and tradesmen.
6. The topic of geography and colonialism is addressed by Anne Godlewska and Neil Smith, eds., *Geography and Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) and Morag Bell, Robin Butlin, and Michael Heffernan, eds., *Geography and Imperialism 1820–1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995). On Richthofen and China, see Hans-Dietrich Schultz, “China- und Europabilder: zur aktuellen Wiederbelebung alter Argumente der klassischen deutschen Geographie,” *Geographische Revue* 14, no. 2 (2012): 5–35. For a general introduction to the topic in a German context, see Ute Wardenga, “Die Welt im Buch: Geographische Länderkunde um 1900,” in *Welt-Räume: Geschichte, Geographie und Globalisierung seit 1900*, ed. Iris Schröder and Sabine Höhler (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2005), 120–146, and Schröder, *Das Wissen von der ganzen Welt*.
7. Gerhard Sandner and Mechthild Rössler, “Geography and Empire in Germany, 1871–1945,” in *Geography and Empire*, ed. Anne Godlewska and Neil Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 115–127, 115.
8. Sandner and Rössler, “Geography and Empire in Germany, 1871–1945,” 121.
9. See Wiebeke Böge, *Die Einteilung der Erde in Grossräume: Zum Weltbild der deutschsprachigen Geographie seit 1871* (Hamburg: Selbstverlag Institut für Geographie der Universität Hamburg, 1997), 28–30, and Hans-Dietrich Schultz, “‘Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland?’ Geographie und Nationalstaat vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg,” *Geographische Rundschau* 47, no. 9 (1995): 492–497.
10. Alexander Honold, “Raum ohne Volk: Zur Imaginationsgeschichte der kolonialen Geographie,” in *Kolonialismus: Kolonialdiskurs und Genozid*, ed. Mirhan Dabag, Horst Gründer, and Uwe-K. Ketelsen (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2004), 95–110. See also Richard Phillips, *Mapping Men and Empire: A Geography of Adventure* (London: Routledge, 1997).
11. Stereotypes in nineteenth-century German youth literature are dealt with by Gina Weinkauff, ed., *Ent-Fernungen: Fremdwahrnehmung und Kulturtransfer in der deutschsprachigen Kinder- und Jugendbuchliteratur seit 1945, Band 1: Fremdwahrnehmung. Zur Thematisierung kultureller Alterität in der deutschsprachigen Kinder- und Jugendbuchliteratur seit 1945* (Munich: Iudicum, 2006).
12. Hans-Dietrich Schultz, ed., *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Geographie. Carl Ritter: Ein Blick in den Zwiespalt der Welt und den Kampf des Menschen, im Blick auf ihren Zusammenhang und ihre Versöhnung* (Berlin: Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Geographisches Institut, 2004), 50.
13. A critical description of this nexus between maps, schools, and imperialistic euphoria is provided by Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 200–206; see also Jeff Bowersox, *Raising Germans in the Age of Empire: Youth and Colonial Culture, 1871–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 54–80.
14. Quoted in John Morrissey, “Imaginative Geographies and Geopolitics,” in *Key Concepts in Historical Geography*, ed. John Morrissey, David Nally, Ulf Strohmayer, and Yvonne Whelan (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014), 81–93.

15. Jane Dove, "Teaching Children the Geography of England and Wales: An Analysis of Selected Georgian and Victorian Textbooks and Educational Pastimes," *Paedagogica Historica* 53, no. 4 (2017): 347–363, 354–356.
16. Emer O'Sullivan, "Around the World in a Jiffy: Playing with Time-Space Compression and Knowledge of the World in Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century German Children's Books and Games," in *The World of Children: Educating and Entertaining Young Germans in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Simone Lässig and Andreas Weiß (New York: Berghahn Books, forthcoming). See also Bowersox, *Raising Germans*, 18–53.
17. Descriptions of non-Europeans as hostile by nature are not unique to European books; certain White settler colonies also perpetuated this narrative. As the textbooks increasingly began to be produced in the colonies themselves, these passages became less and less frequent. See Michelle J. Smith, "Transforming Narratives of Colonial Danger: Imagining the Environments of New Zealand and Australia in Children's Literature, 1862–1899," in *Children, Childhood and Youth in the British World*, ed. Shirleene Robinson und Simon Sleight (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 183–200, 192–196.
18. See Boris Barth and Jürgen Osterhammel, eds., *Zivilisierungsmissionen: Imperiale Weltverbesserungen seit dem 18. Jahrhundert* (Constance: UVK, 2005).