The Korean territory is represented on old maps created in the pre-modern era. Although the boundaries of the territory on these maps are not as clear as on maps made in the modern era, these ancient maps reflect various and unique aspects of the historic Korean territory and serve as cartographic documentations or evidence for such. Collectively, they represent the territorial perceptions and ownership held by the Korean people that had been shaped over time. These territorial documentations are found not only on maps of provinces, military maps, and general maps of Korea, but also on scroll maps made by cartographers both in Korea and from around the world.

Although imperializing in Korea date back to before the Three Kingdoms Period, only the maps made in Joseon Dynasty now survive. The oldest existing map is one of the territorial documentations or evidence for such. Collectively, they represent the territorial perceptions and ownership held by the Korean people that had been shaped over time. These territorial documentations are found not only on maps of provinces, military maps, and general maps of Korea, but also on scroll maps made by cartographers both in Korea and from around the world.

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This map is a manuscript copy of a world map made by Kwon Keun, Kim Sahyung, Lee Mu, and Lee Hoe in 1402 (the 2nd year of King Taejong). With China at the center of the map, it depicts the general form of the Old World, from Africa and Europe in the west to Joseon and Japan in the east. The western part of Arabia is also drawn on the map as it had been learned to Eurasian cartographers through the diffusion of Islamic cartography imported through Mongol influence during China’s Yuan Dynasty. The map shows that Kwon Keun cartographers knew of and interested in different parts of the world. According to the preface at the bottom, the map was constructed from sources based on two Chinese maps, Shengjiao Guangbei Tu and Hunyi Jiangli Tu, maps of the world, and a map of Japan. The map is recognized as one of the best world maps among those produced in the early 15th century. It shows cultural exchanges between East and West and people’s perception of the world at that time.

The Cheonha dojido is a western style world map drawn in Joseon based on Wanguo Quantu (Complete Map of All the Countries) in Zhifang wai ji, a book-length geographical description of the whole world authored by Giulio Aleni, a Christian missionary. Like the Kunyu Wanguo Quantu (Map of the Myriad Countries of the World) made by Matteo Ricci, this map placed China and East Asia at the center of a world map projection with the central meridian placed in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. This was an intentional arrangement promoting Sinocentrism as Ricci had to gain the trust of the imperial Chinese court. Southern continents were marked as a mystery land, reflecting that the southern hemisphere including Australia was not known to the cartographer. The Cheonha dojido clearly labeled the “Small East Sea” and the “Small West Sea,” referring to the East Sea and the West Sea, which did not appear on Aleni’s map, Wanguo Quantu.

The Jigu jeonhudo, made by Choi Hanki in 1834, is a woodblock atlas of hemispheres based on Zhang Tingfu’s world map. The bottom left of the Jigu hudo is marked with the time of mapmaking and the nom de plume (pseudonym) of the cartographer, Tae Yeonjae. This map is different from the Kunyu quantu (Map of the World), an earlier map of the east and west hemispheres made by Ferdinand Verbiest, a Western missionary. While the Kunyu quantu has gaps between lines of longitude that widen toward the edges, the Jigu jeonhudo has even gaps between lines of longitude, and the 24 seasonal divisions were labeled, something which did not appear in other contemporary maps of hemispheres. Oceania and Antarctica are drawn separately, implying that Choi Hanki had knowledge of the discovery of these regions.

The Cheonhado is a circular world map highly popular among literati-scholars of the late Joseon Dynasty. The map was drawn within a circle. The structure of the map consists of an internal continent at the center surrounded by an internal sea, an external continent, and an external sea. The internal continent contains actual countries like China, Korea, and India. The external sea includes both real island countries like Japan and the Ryukyu Kingdom as well as imaginary states like Ilmok Kingdom, Daein Kingdom, and Samsu Kingdom that appeared in the Chinese “Classic of Mountains and Seas” or “Shanhaijing.” This circular map is simple, reflecting the traditional idea of “Tian Yuan Di Fang” (round heaven and square earth).
This is a complete map, which contains both a clear identification of its cartographer and the year of its making. It was created by Jeyonggam (the Tribute Management Office), which was in charge of the supply of royal garments and food. Scientific mapmaking projects were initiated in the early Joseon Dynasty under the reign of King Sejong, resulting in the publication of the cumulative geographic knowledge portrayed in the Dongkuk jido (Map of Korea) by Jeong Cheok and Yang Sungji. The Joseon bangyeok jido is supposedly a copy of the Dongkuk jido. The name of the map appears at the top, the map itself at the center, and the list of participating officials at the bottom. The geographic features of the mid and southern parts of Korea are relatively precise, but those of the northern part are rather distorted. The drainage pattern is quite accurate except for the Amnokgang and the Dumangang; mountain ranges are expressed in the form of mountain chains based on the traditional geomantic understanding of the land.

Resembling the style and designs of the Dongkuk jido made by Jeong Sangki, the Aguk chongdo presents the beauty of the Korean territory in an exquisite manner. This map is notable for its use of vivid color: green for mountain ranges, blue for rivers, and five distinctive colors for different counties and prefectures. Provincial offices and boundaries in eight provinces were circled and marked with respective place names to make them distinguishable. In addition, islands off the coasts of Korea were drawn in clear, applying the growing national interest in the coastal and insular regions. Dokdo in the East Sea is expressed to the east of Ulleungdo, and Tsushima is also portrayed on the map. The marginal spaces were filled with the frontier territory, respective lengths of east to west and north to south, distances to Seoul from the end points of four directions, and the number of counties and prefectures of each province.

The Daedong yeojido, made by Kim Jeongho, is a splendid achievement which built upon previous cartographic developments during the Joseon Dynasty. Its scale is approximately 1:160,000. Kim divided the territory from north to south by 120-ri into 22 sections. Each section is folded at every 80-ri and collapses into a folding booklet. The 22 booklets can be unfolded and pieced together to form a complete map of Korea that measures 410 cm in width and 660 cm in length. The method of description reflected the principle of partition and unity of the mountains and the streams which recognized equally the mountains and the Streams. Various legends are used and the pathways are marked for every 10-li. Above all, the map is an impeccable masterpiece with the most prominent artistic beauty of any map ever produced in the Joseon Dynasty.
This Korean frontier map focuses on the northeastern region of Korea and Manchuria during the Joseon Dynasty. The term "pia" in "Seobukpia" of the map title refers to both the Chinese Qing and Korean Joseon Dynasties respectively. It was designed to defend the country from China’s invasion. The map covers a wide area with Baekdusan at the center and from River Heilongjiang (Black Dragon River) in Manchuria to Shoal Park in the West, delineating post towns and military bases established along the extensive fortress walls and roads. The map orientation is unique. Instead of aligning the map with a north-south direction, "haejwa sahyang" was used so the country faces the sa (south-southeast) direction with the direction hae (north-northwest) in the back. Places like Jilin and Ningguta, where the Qing Dynasty was founded, were marked in red.

This map describes a wall-reinforced Yanshan, which was valued as incomparable fortresses. It was the final line of defense to the Manchurian area, fortified by rugged mountains on all sides. The area was located in a natural fortress. Even during the Manchurian War of 1636, the castle never fell to the Qing army. The castle is composed of the main fortress, north fortress, east fortress, and west fortress. The north gate was an important gateway that connects Apsan and Pyongyang. The main fortress was also known for its beauty, a historically unique place, and was famously depicted in the poem "Yaksan Azaleas," which is mentioned in the poetry "Apsan" by Kyeong Bu-sung.
The name East Sea or Dokdo refers to the sea to the east of the Korean Peninsula, and Dokdo is located there as a number of ancient maps. The name East Sea appears in various references such as on the monument of King Gwanggaeto, Seoyang Angdol (sea equations), and old maps. The name East Sea is actually founded in the late 18th-century, April changgok. In addition, the map displays the names of Korean Sea: East Sea, the West Sea, and the South Sea.

The name East Sea also appears on a Western-style world map entitled Choseenchabo (sea), which is now preserved in the Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies at Seoul National University. It was made in the Joseon Dynasty and was based on the Wanggas (seas) by Gikdo Akhi. On the map, the East Sea is referred to as the “Small East Sea” and the West Sea as the “Small West Sea.” These names were also used in the Chosonchabo by the Joseon Dynasty as they did not appear in Ahn’s Wanggas (seas).

Dokdo appeared on various ancient Korean maps. It was called “Usando” in the Joseon period. The island was marked as part of Korean territory on various Jindo jido (Maps of Korea) as well as on the Ulleungdo maps included within the maps of countries and provinces. Dokdo or Usando was extremely marked in the Joseon Ulleungdo on the maps made in the early Joseon period. However, in the late Joseon period, the location was neglected and the island was placed to the east of Ulleungdo as a result of the famous Ahn Yongbok incident, which facilitated communication of new information about Dokdo. The Dongbok jido by Jeong Sangki; 1762, which was compiled from previous cumulative research on the time of King Youngjo and King Jeongjo. This map was drawn much more improved than pictorial maps of Korea that became active under the reigns of the Joseon Dynasty and was based on the Chinese perspective. Its format and content are similar to the Dongbok jido made by Yong Sangi, the mountain chain, the hydrographic pattern, and the topographical contours were drawn in the same manner as on the Dongbok jido. On this map, Jangbang Pong or Ulleungdo was described as a mountain and Usando was shown as a small island with a mountain peak as part of Ulleungdo’s interior area. In addition, a sea route running from Ulsan to Nagasaki was included on the map. In the margins is a short statement about the history of Ulleungdo and its geographic background, which is the same as the one included in the Dongbok Angdol Angguk jeondo. A Japanese cartographer, John Senex’s map shows a Chinese maritime territorial system. The country name is marked as “K(ingdom) of Korea.” The East Sea is marked as “The Eastern Sea” or “Corea Sea.”

The inclusion of Dokdo in Korean territory is also found on maps published in Japan. Shinsen chosonchabo (Newly Edited Whole Map of Joseon Dynasty) by Tanaka Akiyosi in 1894 labeled Ulleungdo and Dokdo as “Jukdo (Takeshima)” and “Songdo (Matsushima)” in the same color. Later, in 1735, Joseon was not appeared in European maps prior to the early 17th century, at the 1705 by Delisle, a French cartographer. Senex’s map shows the East Sea as being narrower than its actual width. The country name is marked as “K(ingdom) of Corea.” The East Sea is marked as “The Eastern Sea” or “Corea Sea.”

A good case in point is a map of Asia made in 1720 by an English cartographer, John Senex. It is an English translation of a map made in 1705 by Delisle, a French mapmaker. Senex’s map shows a Korean maritime territorial system. The country name is marked as “K(ingdom) of Corea.” The East Sea is marked as “The Eastern Sea” or “Corea Sea.”

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