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“Material Culture and Synthetic Worldviews on Late Eighteenth-century Japanese Maps”
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The proliferation of Western knowledge in Japan has often been analysed as a distinct field of ‘Dutch studies’ centred on Edo. However, until the beginning of the nineteenth-century it was undertaken by an informal network of scholars with varying skills, and occurred just as much in Nagasaki and Osaka. Their preoccupation with updated information was matched by their fascination with foreign material culture. For instance, in 1786 Katsuragawa Hoshu was translating Blaeu’s 1648 world map by affixing paper slips to the original, while his brother Morishima Churyo was recording stories about foreign lands while pasting foreign papers in his scrapbook. Such materials were fragmentary and their understanding required collaborative knowledge. Nevertheless, attempts were made to integrate them into a synthetic worldview. For example, whilst Nagakubo Sekisui’s 1788 world map was based on Matteo Ricci’s ‘outdated’ model, it was updated with recent political and scientific information. This was part of a larger phenomenon visible at all levels of society: the impact of the materiality of foreign objects on the geographical imaginary.