1. LANDFORM CLASSIFICATION
2. NAMES OF NATURAL REGIONS

1. Landform Classification

The landform of the Japanese Islands is undulating.

Mountainous regions, including those of volcanoes and hills, accounts for about 75% of the total area of the country. As the mountains are divided by numerous valleys, their slopes are generally steep and most are covered with forests. The height of the mountains in the Tyūbu Region exceeds 3,000m. Portions of small-scale glacial landforms are distributed in the Hidaka Range and the Hida Range.

Tablelands and terraces are distributed throughout the country and are used mainly as fields. Many pyroclastic tablelands are distributed throughout Hokkaidō and Kyūsyū; they are known as Sirasu tablelands in southern Kyūsyū.

Plains and basins are generally small-scale and scattered throughout the country. They were formed mainly diastrophism and sedimentation of rivers. Rivers deposit sand and gravel at the mouths of valleys, forming conical alluvial fans towards the lowlands. Alluvial fans are widely distributed through the Tōhoku and Tyūbu Districts. The sandy sediments that overflow from the lower reaches of a river during a flood form land which is slightly higher than the surrounding area, and are known as natural levees. Settlements and roads are frequently established on these levees. As these lowlands are very important for developing production activities, they are frequently artificially altered by river improvement, readjustment of arable land, preparation for housing sites and land reclamation.

The Japanese Islands comprise large mountain ranges rising at the northwestern edge of the Pacific and are composed of arcs which are convex to the Pacific; these are termed an island-arc trench system, with paired trenches parallel to the arcs. The landforms of the Japanese Islands can be divided into Northeast Japan and Southwest Japan by geographical features. The mountain ranges and basins extend from north to south in Northeast Japan. Their distribution west-ward from the Pacific is as follows: highlands such as the Kitakami and the Abukuma valleys such as the Kitakami River and the Abukuma River; the Ōu Range; basins such as the Yokote, the Sinzyō and the Yonezawa; and the Dewa Range. All volcanoes in Northeast Japan occur west of the Ōu Range.

Southwest Japan is separated by the Median Tectonic Line extending from south of Suwa Basin to near Yatusiro in Kyūsyū. Medial or low relief mountains are present from Seto Uti to the coast of the Japan Sea, while high relief mountains are located on the Pacific side.

The islands of Izu are aligned north-south and can be recognized as an extension of Northeast Japan. The Fossa Magna region in central Japan is an area where two island-arcs overlap and has a peculiar and complex structure in comparison with other regions.

[Salient Points of the Legend and Map Compilation]

Mountains and Hills

Strong relief mountains: mountains with areas exceeding 600m in local relief.

Medial relief mountains: mountains with areas of 200–600m in local relief.

Low relief mountains and hills: mountains and hills with areas less than 200m in local relief.

Local relief, as referred to here, is the difference in altitude between the highest and lowest points within an area 1′ in the south-north direction and 1.5′ in the east-west direction. Reference was made to the Relief Map of the Economic Planning Agency.

Volcanoes

Volcano steep slope: steep original surfaces and dissected valleys of Quaternary volcanoes.

Volcano gentle slope: gentle slope represents the so-called "volcano skirt", including mud flow landforms, lava flow landforms and alluvial fans at the foot of volcanoes.

Tablelands and Terraces

Lava plateau: plateau composed of lava, including those which errupted before the Quaternary Period.

Pyroclastic tablelands: tablelands composed of pyroclastic flow sediments.

Karstic tablelands: corroded landforms existing in limestone regions, including upthrown coral reefs.

Fluvial and coastal terraces of tablelands (higher): dissected fans, upthrown coastal plains and river terraces, at higher altitudes.

Fluvial and coastal terraces of tablelands (lower): dissected fans, upthrown coastal plains and river terraces at lower altitudes.

Lowlands

Alluvial fan: alluvial fan, including gently sloped fans.

Flood plain: a somewhat high, dry section of an alluvial plain.

Delta and backmarsh: low and humid portions of an alluvial plain.

Sand dune and sand bar: sand or gravel-sedimented landforms in a littoral area.

2. Names of Natural Regions

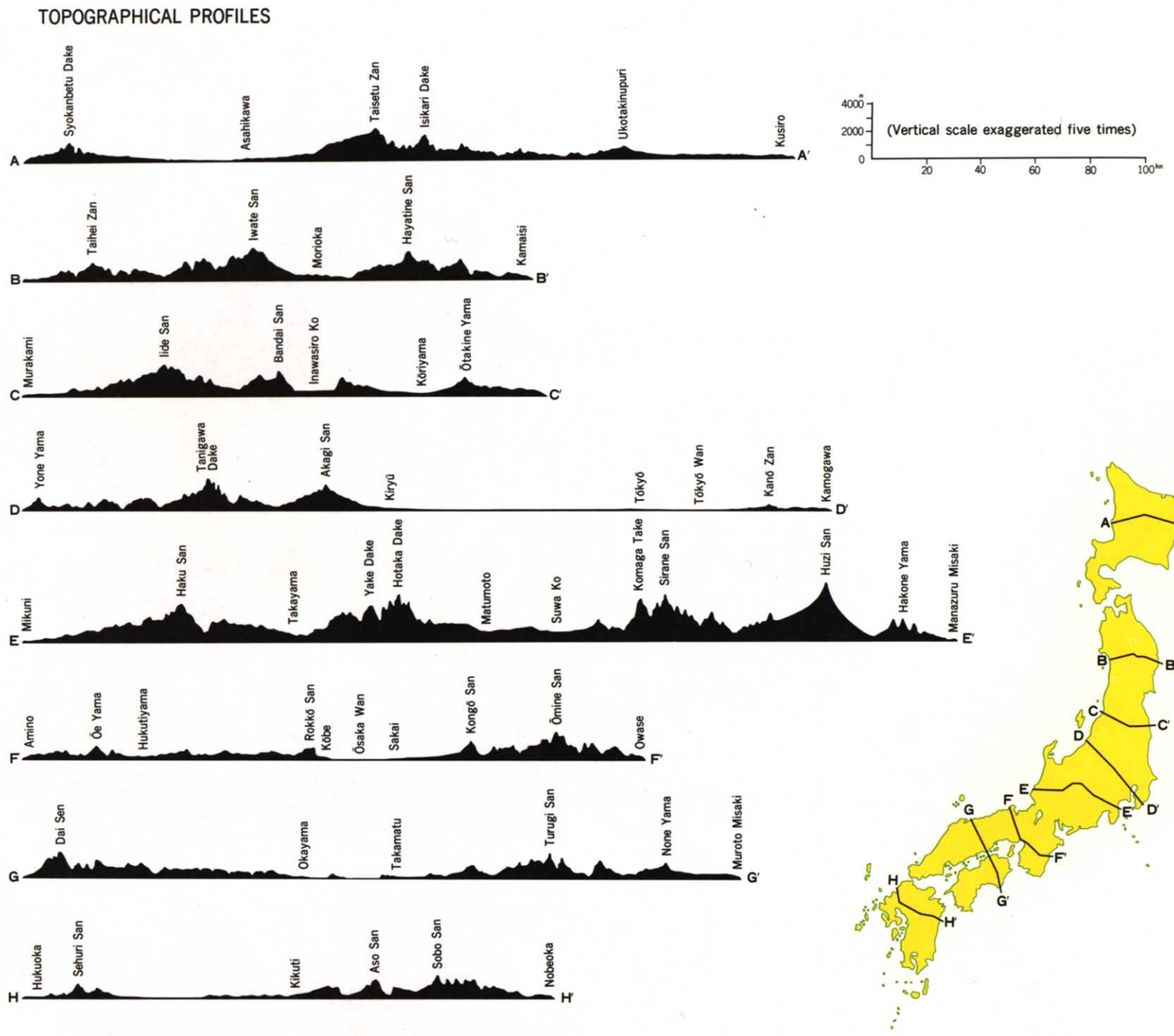
[Salient Points of the Legend and Map Compilation]

This map shows, principal names of places, such as mountains, plains, peninsulas and archipelagos which, to some extent, are considered to be a regional unit. Those which have been widely and commonly used for a long time are accepted as names. These names were recorded on the 1:200,000 scale Regional Maps and smaller scale maps published by the Geographical Survey Institute. However, other names may be used in general.

[Sources]

1. Economic Planning Agency, 1:500,000 scale Land Classification Maps (Landform Classification Maps), 1967
2. Geographical Survey Institute, 1:800,000 scale Landform Classification Maps, 1958
3. Economic Planning Agency, 1:1,160,000 scale Relief Map, 1969
4. National Land Agency, 1:200,000 scale Land Classification Maps (Landform Classification Maps), 1970—1977
5. Research Group for Quaternary Tectonic Map, 1:2,000,000 scale Quaternary Tectonic Map of Japan, 1969
6. Kaizuka Sohei, Landform Division of Japan, Tōkyō Astronomical Observatory ed., Chronological Scientific Tables, Maruzen Co., Ltd., 1988
7. Geographical Survey Institute, Map of Names of Major Natural Regions, 1954
8. Geographical Survey Institute, Series of Standard Place Names (Natural Place Names), 1981

TOPOGRAPHICAL PROFILES

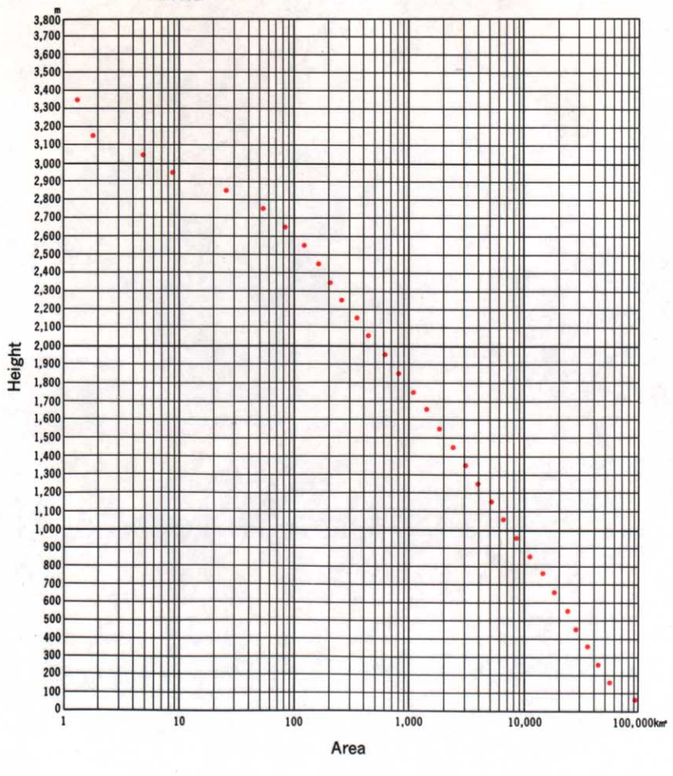


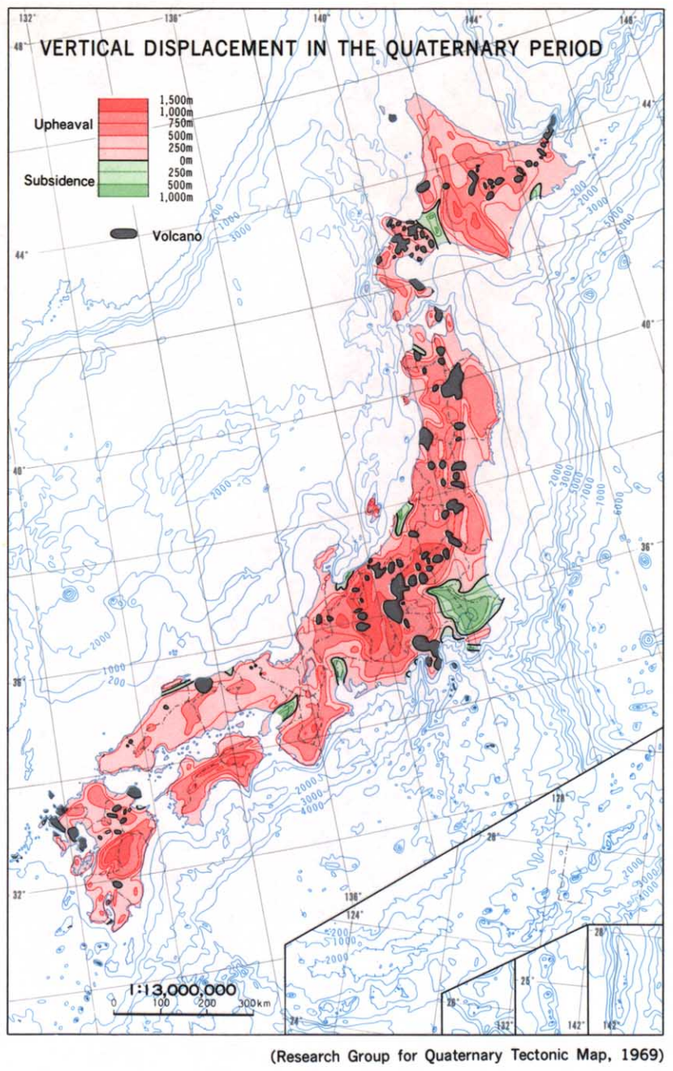
AREA OF JAPAN BY ALTITUDE

The altitude of intersection at intervals of 15′ longitude and 22.5′ latitude was taken mainly from the 1:25,000 scale Topographic Maps. After the area was adjusted according to latitude, the reading was converted into area and a tabulation made for every 100 m elevation.

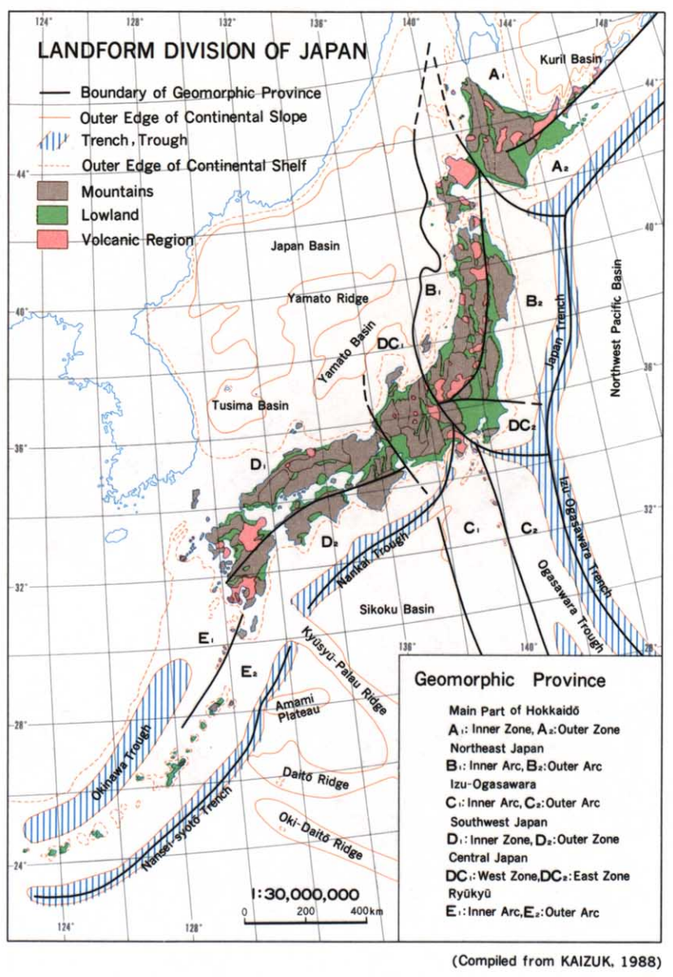
There were about 590,000 points of intersection in the coordinate system.

Land measuring less than 0 m in elevation and lakes were excluded.





(Research Group for Quaternary Tectonic Map, 1969)



(Compiled from KAIZUK, 1988)

2.1


LANDFORM CLASSIFICATION
Mountains and Hills
Strong relief mountains
Medial relief mountains
Low relief mountains and hills
Volcanoes
Volcano steep slope
Volcano gentle slope
Tablelands and Terraces
Lava plateau
Pyroclastic tablelands
Karstic tablelands
Fluvial and coastal terraces of tablelands (higher)
Fluvial and coastal terraces of tablelands (lower)
Lowlands
Alluvial fan
Flood plain
Delta and backmarsh
Sand dune and sand bar
Summit of mountain
Summit of mountain (Volcano)
1 : 2,500,000
0 50 100 150km
JAPAN SEA
NORTH PACIFIC OCEAN
SADO
OKI
TUSIMA
ŌSUMI SYOTŌ
TOKARA RETTŌ
RYŪKYŪ SYOTŌ
SAKISIMA SYOTŌ
OKINAWA SYOTŌ
AMAMI SYOTŌ
Etorohu Tō
Kunasiri Tō
HABOMAI SYOTŌ
Okinawa Zima
Ō Sima

2.1