

## Mapping borders in times of uncertainty

Qin Ying

In 1889, the government office *Huidian guan* 會典館 [Office of Collected Statutes] ordered every province to collect and make maps of their territory. As a result, a year later, a special office for making maps was established, and in 1892, the *Huidian guan* made a second announcement, specifying the technical regulations for the project. The resulting atlas that combined the surveys from all provinces was titled *Daqing huidian yutu* 大清會典輿圖 [Maps of the Great Qing by the Huidian Office].

Every province exceeded the given time limit of one year, most of them finishing within three to five years. Some of the maps were printed, while some were manuscript drafts when the provinces sent the maps to the *Huidian guan*. The quality of the maps varied from only slightly updated old maps to excellent new surveys. On the *Yunnan quansheng yutu* 雲南全省輿圖 [Complete Maps of Yunnan Province], the atlas of Yunnan Province made for the *Daqing huidian yutu*, for example, only the regions around the capital of Yunnan used new surveying techniques, while other parts of the province continued to use old mapping material, only updating the legends, and adding a grid with latitude and longitude. This situation of the mapping of Yunnan province is partly representational of other regions in China at that time.

Today, at least four manuscript sets of the atlas of *Yunnan quansheng yutu* are extant. Two of them are kept in Beijing, one in Chengdu, and one in Kunming. As the border between China and French Annam was disputed and undergoing changes during the time when the maps had to be sent to the *Huidian guan*, studying these maps and other maps of Yunnan related to them, reveals how late Qing central and local government officials carefully edited information about borders.

In 1896, the previous governor of Yunnan and Guizhou, Song Fan 崧蕃 (?-1905),

presented the maps to the emperor. From his memorial to the throne, we learn that there were indeed officials in Yunnan province who compiled the maps. Material from every county arrived in the provincial capital, Kunming, where a committee combined the information from all around Yunnan and corrected errors.

After the completion of the maps in 1894, the political situation changed at the border between China and French Annam, and a year later, Mengwu 猛烏 and Wude 烏得 (today in northern Laos), were signed over to French Annam in a treaty after the Sino-Japanese war. As the office for compiling the *Daqing huidian yutu* urged the province to quickly send the documents in 1896, the compilers of the Yunnan province atlas only had time to add notes to each instance of Mengwu and Wude appearing in the atlas

in each of the four editions, explaining the disputed nature. The governor of Yunnan also sent another copy of the atlas to the Guangxu emperor (r.1875–1908), and two further copies were archived in the local government – a standard administrative procedure. This is why we have four similar drafts of the *Yunnan quansheng yutu* today.

The *Daqing huidian yutu* also influenced new local gazetteers. While the map material in Ruan Yuan's 阮元 (1764–1849) *Yunnan tongzhi gao* 雲南通志稿 and the 1894 *Yunnan tongzhi gao* 雲南通志 was still based on surveys of the Kangxi and Qianlong periods, Tang Jiong's 唐炯 (1829–1909) *Xu Yunnan tongzhi gao* 續雲南通志稿, printed in 1898 and 1901, already uses the new mapping style of the *Daqing huidian yutu* (fig.3). In his gazetteers, Tang Jiong provides clear written descriptions about the situation of the French-Chinese

border at Mengwu and Wude, thus accomplishing what the compilers of the *Yunnan quansheng yutu* had not been able to do due to time constraints. His two editions of the *Xu Yunnan tongzhi gao* were produced in Sichuan, and so one set of the *Yunnan quansheng yutu* is now collected in Chengdu.

The manuscripts of the *Yunnan quansheng yutu* are important documents as they preserve the original outline of the maps presented to the central government. Their editing history shows us that late Qing mapmakers paid great attention to changing borders and that they and compilers of gazetteers reacted quickly to new political situations.

Qin Ying is Associate Professor at the College of Historical Culture and Tourism, Southwest Minzu University qinying\_yb@163.com

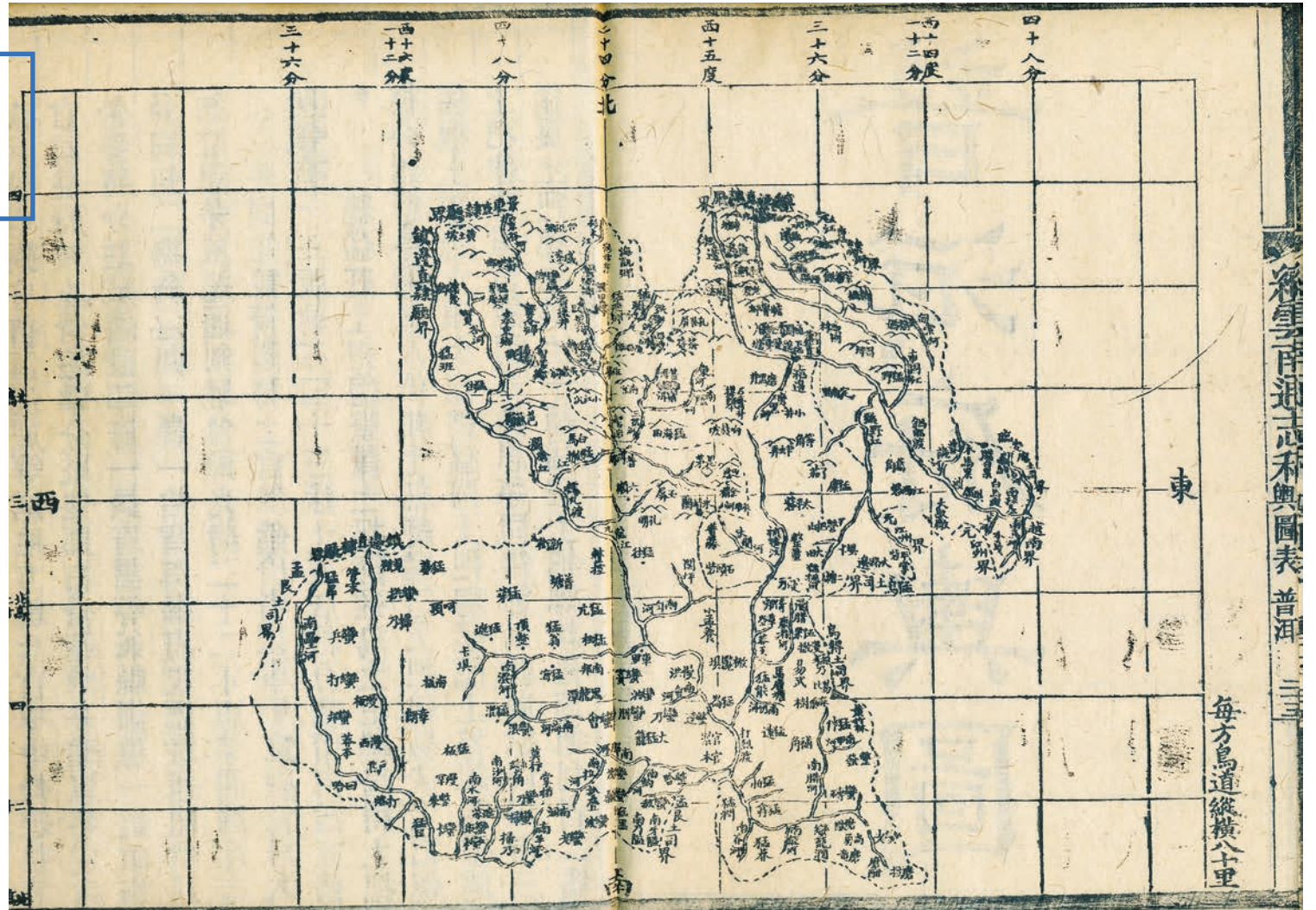


Fig. 3: The Map of Pu'er 普洱 from Tang Jiong's *Xu Yunnan tongzhi*. At the Southwestern border, Mengwu and Wude are marked. Courtesy Wu Yee Sun Library – University of Macau.

## Maritime maps as painted screens

Stephen Davies

Early modern Chinese maritime maps are intriguing when one looks at them as a seafaring navigator. When one reads them, that is, as expressions of a perceived relationship between the worlds of land and sea. They speak of an earlier world of humanity when the sea was the alien other, the great void.

A modern nautical chart at large scale has crisp lines and clearly contrasting colours showing the exact locus of points along which land becomes intertidal zone, and intertidal zone becomes sea. At smaller scales only one line and two contrasting colours suffice: this side land, that side sea. In both cases the lines are continuous, delineating a given coastline with a precision dependent on scale. In all cases the delineations are tightly anchored to a geodesy and a geography that allow us to identify any specific point on a coastline and, depending on scale, read off its position to within ±5 metres and, if it has a toponym, read that as well. It tells a sailor with precision where the dangers lie and how to avoid them as well as showing with precision how to find the way into and out of safe havens.

Whether we are looking at the so-called 'Zheng He map' contained in Mao Yuanyi's *Wubei zhi* 武備志 [Treatise on Armament Preparations], one of the many coastal maps of China like Chen Lunjiong's 陳倫炯 *Yanhai quantu* 沿海全圖 [The Complete Map of the Coastline], or one of the 'coastal view' guides like the Yale Maps (fig.4), the message is different. There is neither geodetic nor geographical precision, nor were such intended. As Sinologists note, that isn't what such maps are about. In relation to Qing maps as Ronald C. Po nicely, if somewhat opaquely puts it, "the maritime space claimed by the Qing court did not have an exact boundary. Instead, time and space were the foundation of Qing justifications for sovereignty over its maritime frontier".<sup>1</sup>

What's interesting to the sailor is that the coastline on such maps is as much absence as presence. Yes, there is a more or less elaborate depiction of something separating the sea from any coastal and inland features shown. Yes, there are various very general textual descriptions of what's where. There is a toponymy, though a very selective and

often an inconstant one. But exactly – and the emphasis there is on 'exactly' – where and how the sea joins the land and the land the sea, and how a seafarer may make in safely from 'out there' to a sought haven 'in here' is ignored as, in a sense, irrelevant. The world of the sea is what it is: separate, as if lying on the other side of a vast, dense fogbank that begins inland and stretches a few miles out to sea. Between it and the world of the land lies a zone with forts and lookouts, mountains and islands which poke up through the fog, but the inlets and river mouths, shoals and shallows are at best vague contrasts perceived as the fog swirls, thins and thickens. We see an opaque barrier, penetrable only with difficulty, not an enabling interface.

Even the few score maritime route books, or rutters, have a similar take. Almost all begin and end when the mariner is at sea in the offing. On the intricacies of the inner coastal zone they are largely silent.

From a navigator's perspective the border between land and sea in such sources is indeterminate and yet absolute. The depictions are a way of saying that from out there to in here, or in here to out there, you must be someone who is authorised, or you must find someone who is authorised, to enter or leave. Here is here, there is there, and passage between the two should not be free or easy.

The few examples of what would seem to be the mariners' own 'coastal view' guides also have this distanced take on the coast itself. The coast proper in all its infinite detail

reduces to the occasional salient feature – an island, a rock, a shoal, a promontory – that swims out of a general indeterminacy as something to be avoided, that marks a turning point, or signals where the mariner can pray, get water, or anchor. But to penetrate the inner fastnesses of the land behind the nebulous coastline more detailed knowledge must be sought from those who guard it.

The sea and the land are not an interpenetrating whole at the junction of which terrestrial transport gives way as seamlessly as possible to its seaborne kin. So, on Chinese maritime maps the borderlines along which lie the places where such awkward – even abnormal – exchanges happen are not precisely shown, no more than are the ways to and from them. There is no making plain the way. Nor should there be. Each to their own.

Stephen Davies is Hon Professor at the Department of Real Estate and Construction, and Hon Institute Fellow at the Hong Kong Institute for the Humanities & Social Sciences at the University of Hong Kong. stephen.davies79@gmail.com

### Notes

- 1 Po, R.C. 2016. 'Mapping maritime power and control: a study of the late eighteenth century *Qisheng yanhai tu* (a coastal map of the seven provinces)', *Late Imperial China* 37(2):98.