Borders on Chinese Maps

Elke Papelitzky

The most eye-catching feature on the mid-16th century general map of China in Luo Hongxian's 羅洪先 (1504–1564) influential atlas *Guangyu tu* 廣輿圖 is a long black strip north of China labelled *shamo* 沙漠: the Gobi Desert (fig.1). Visually, the desert very clearly separates China from the 'northern barbarians', depicting a seemingly impenetrable border. For decades, Luo Hongxian's vision of the desert shaped the way Chinese mapmakers portrayed the Gobi Desert, emphasizing this natural border.

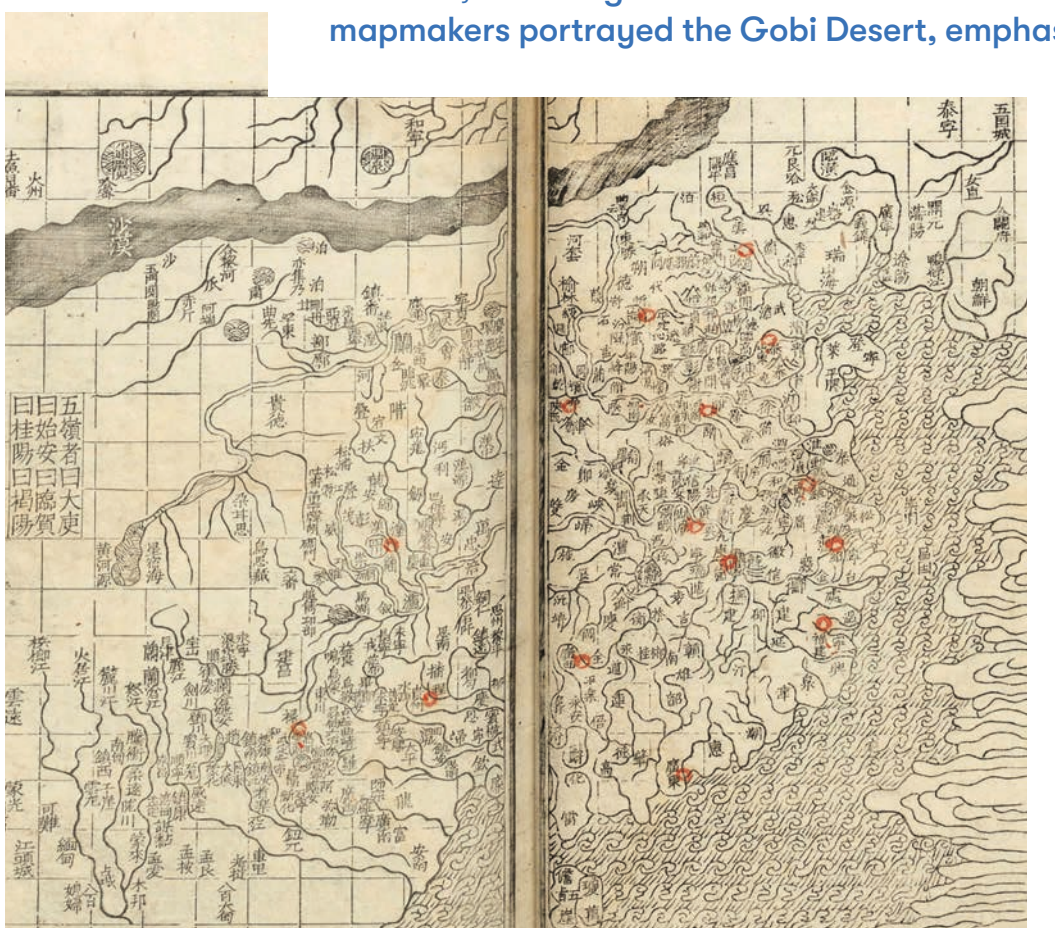

Fig1: Section of the general map of China from the 1566 edition of the *Guangyu tu*. Courtesy of the Harvard-Yenching Library.

Later adaptations of the map, however, while keeping the shape of the desert based on the *Guangyu tu*, changed the symbol used for the desert: some mapmakers used little dots as a symbol for the sandy desert, and others just left the strip white with black contours. Maps depicting the desert in such a way were made throughout the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1912), well into the 19th century.

Not all borders on Chinese maps appear as prominent as the Gobi Desert. In this section, four scholars will introduce different aspects of mapping borders and borderlands in Ming and Qing China. Sometimes, borders are even curiously missing, as Mario Cams discusses in his contribution. Qin Ying describes how in late 19th and early 20th century Yunnan, changes in the political situation resulted in officials having to quickly adapt to new circumstances. Gu Songjie introduces a mapping project that aimed to deepen knowledge of the northeastern borderlands in the 18th century. And as the Gobi Desert is a natural and not a political border, Stephen Davies looks at the border between land and sea on Chinese maritime maps.

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At the borders of Qing imperial cartography

Mario Cams

Qing China's Kangxi (1661–1722), Yongzheng (1722–1735), and Qianlong (1735–1796) emperors each produced large atlases of the empire they ruled, entitled *Huangyu quan(lan) tu* 皇輿全(覽) 圖 [*Overview Maps of Imperial Territories*]. Different editions were produced during each of these reigns, some in the form of atlases, some in the form of large multi-sheet maps.

Maps without borders?

The Kangxi atlas covers Qing controlled territories and adjacent tributary lands such as Korea and Tibet. To this, the Yongzheng map (see QingMaps.org) adds all of the Russian Empire up to Riga and Asia Minor, whereas the Qianlong map expands this scope even further to include the northern subcontinent and the Arabian Peninsula. This raises the question of how the Qing depicted its borders on these "Overview Maps of Imperial Territories".

A quick look shows that no borders are depicted in the north, including in areas where the successive maps expanded their scope; there is no trace of a border between the Qing and Russian empires, for example, despite the existence of two border treaties, Nerchinsk (1689) and Kyakhta (1727). Another example is the apparent absence of the Qing–Korean border. In contrast, in the southwest of Qing territories, dotted lines trace the border that Yunnan province shared with what is now Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam. Similarly, although only on the Kangxi and Yongzheng maps, dotted lines surround unmapped blank pockets in Guizhou province that constituted tribal lands. Thus, it seems external borders in the southwest are clearly indicated, whereas legally confirmed borders in the north and northwest did not find their way onto these large multi-sheet maps. How can we explain this paradox?

Space versus territory

A closer look reveals that borders internal to the Qing are emphasized and exaggerated. One such border is the Willow Palisade, long since in disrepair by the time these atlases were produced, which separated Mongols from Manchus and runs from the Great Wall northeast of Beijing all the way around Mukden (Shenyang) and Kirin Hoton (Jilin), with one stretch branching off towards the (undepicted) border with Korea. On the other hand, there is the Great Wall itself, most of it built as a defensive structure during the late Ming precisely in order to keep the Manchu at bay. Like the Willow Palisade, this border is greatly exaggerated, giving the false impression that it formed one uninterrupted and uniform wall from east to west (fig.2). With this, Qing court maps stress one of the hallmarks of Qing rule: the separate administration, territorially defined, of Manchu, Mongols, and Han (later also including the Tibetans and the mostly Muslim population in the 'western regions' *xiyu* 西域).

The absence of legally defined external borders combined with a strong emphasis on internal borders can be understood by considering the difference between imperial territory and its prerequisite, imperial space. Taken as a whole, these maps communicate Qing space and therefore leave open the possibility of further expansion and conquest, particularly in the direction of the court's northwest-oriented gaze. On the other hand, it was imperative for this minority-ruled empire to distinguish between the Manchu, Mongol and Han territories it effectively controlled. Beyond this, Tibetan and Korean tributary lands were also covered under the imperial umbrella, but these lands are mostly separated by river systems so that no border needed to be drawn. In the southwest, where the dotted line delineates Yunnan, we are in fact also dealing with an internal border of sorts, separating the province from more tributary lands (left blank in this case). The fact that provinces are also separated by a dotted line where no natural border is present confirms this thesis.

In short, whereas these court maps as a whole communicate a universal and therefore a theoretically borderless imperial space, they clearly distinguish among the imperial territories, including tributary states that made up and defined the Qing order. In other words, it is not at the edge but at the very center of these maps that we find ourselves at the borders of Qing cartography.

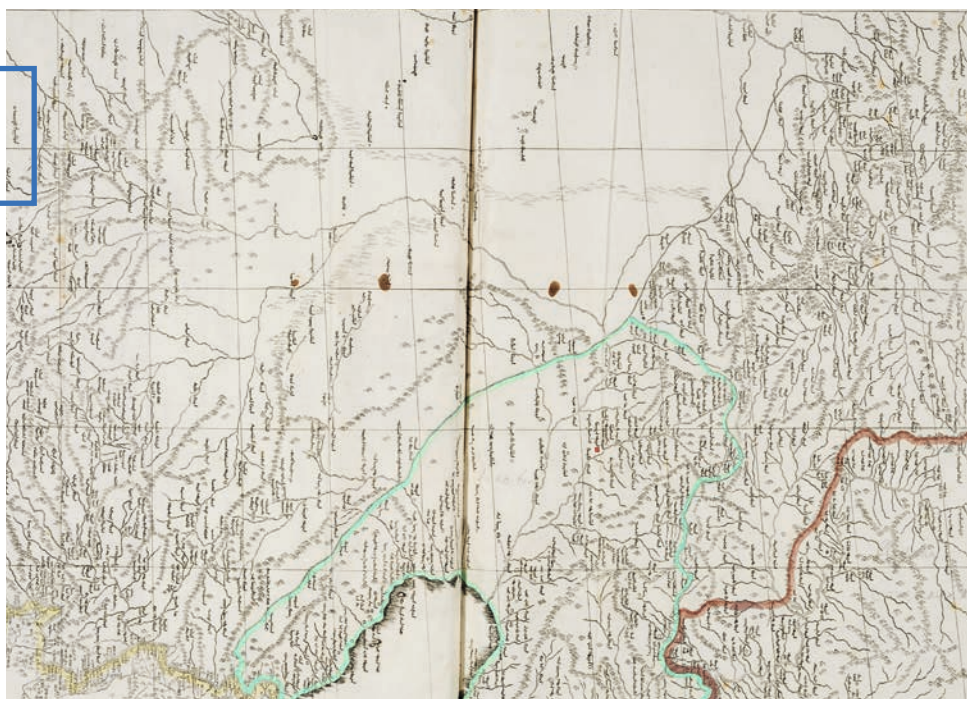

Fig. 2: 1719 copperplate version of the Kangxi-era multi-sheet map. Borders highlighted in print and in colour include the Willow Palisade (centre, in green); and the Great Wall (bottom left, in yellow). Although colour was also applied to highlight the border between Qing and Korean lands (bottom right, in brown), this border is not indicated on the print itself. About 40-64 cm. Royal Library of Belgium, LP VB 11.283 E (2), fol. 10. Reproduced with permission of the Royal Library of Belgium, Brussels.

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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 崧藩 (?-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* 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.

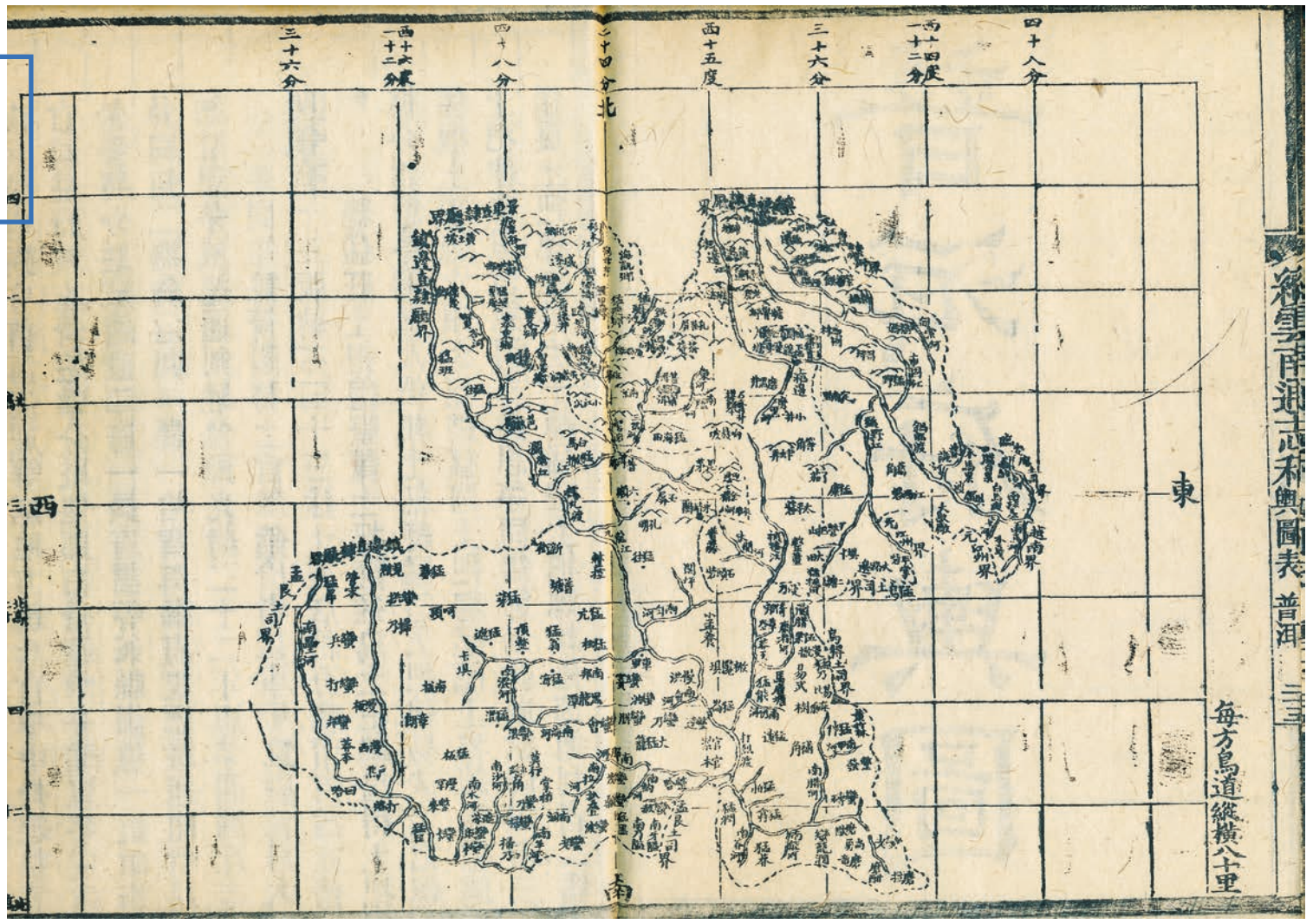

Fig. 3: The Map of Pu'er 普洱 from Tang Jiong's *Xu Yunnan tongzhi*. At the Southwestern border, Mengwu and Wude are marked. Courtesy Wu Yee Sun Library – University of Macau.

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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".[1]

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 inter-penetrating 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.

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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.

Mapping Manchuria. A brief study of the *Territorial Map of Military Deeds in Shengjing, Jilin, and Heilongjiang*

Gu Songjie

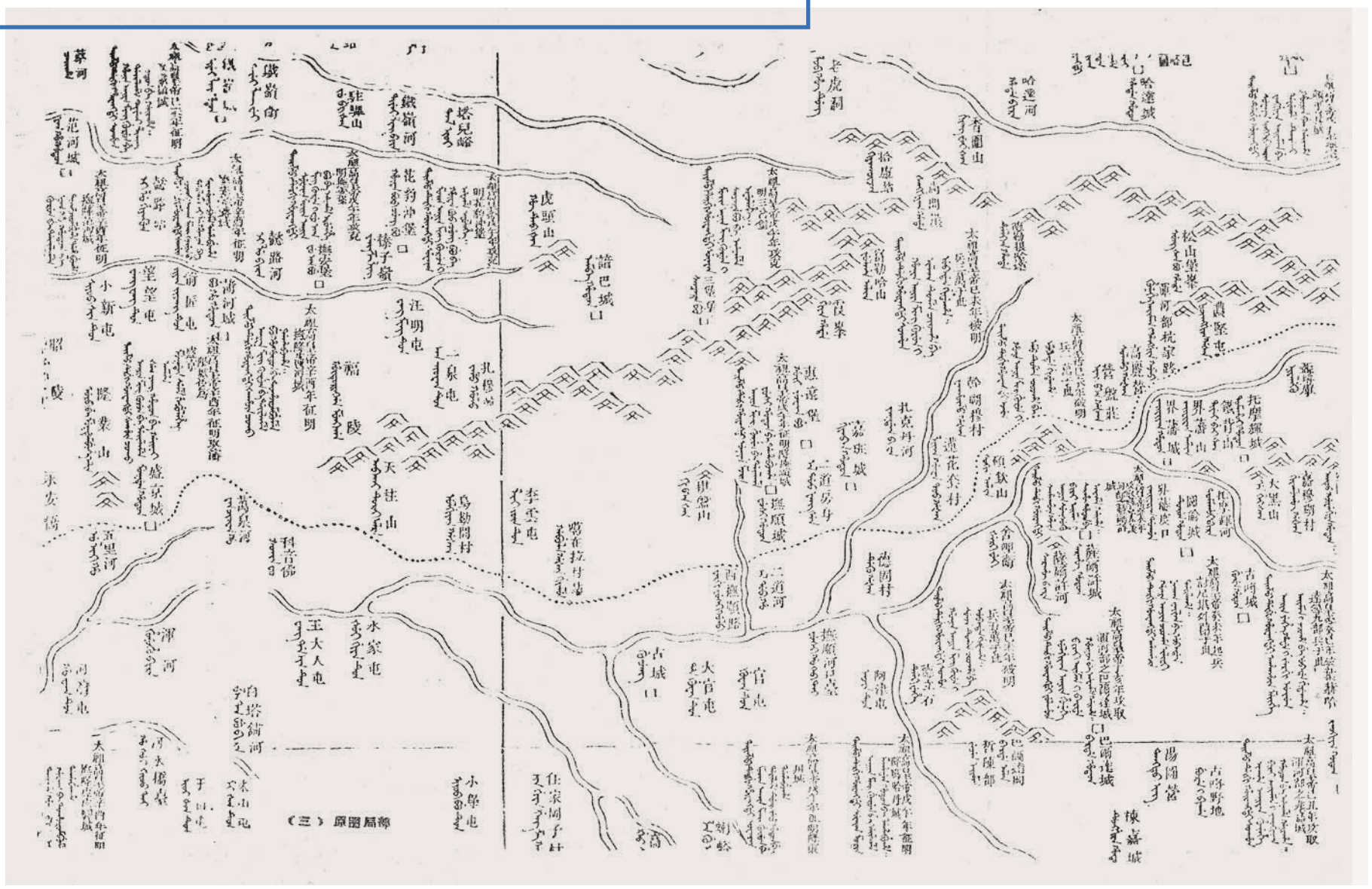

Fig.5: The *Territorial Map of Military Deeds in Shengjing, Jilin and Heilongjiang*. Courtesy *Qingchu shiliao congkan* 清初史料叢刊.

In 1775, the Qianlong emperor (reigned 1735–1796) read through the Old Manchu Archives [*Manwen laodang* 滿文老檔] and discovered that they mentioned many places in Manchuria, but he could not find a map that showed the location of these places. As he considered it important to have a map of the homeland of his ancestors, and in order to preserve the Manchu identity, he initiated a mapping project of this region, resulting in the *Territorial Map of Military Deeds in Shengjing, Jilin, and Heilongjiang (fig.5)* [*Shengjing, Jilin, Heilongjiang dengchu biaozhu zhanji yutu* 盛京吉林黑龍江等處標註戰績輿圖]. Qianlong's goal for this Map of Military Deeds was to commemorate his ancestors and to display the military achievements of the conquest in China's northeast before the Manchus had established Beijing as the capital of the Qing in 1644.

To make the map, Qianlong ordered officials to check the Old Manchu Archives, the *Gazetteer of Shengjing* [*Shengjing zhi* 盛京志], and the *Venerable Records* [*Shilu* 實錄] and to list place names mentioned in these sources. Qianlong wanted the lists to be sent to the garrison generals of Shengjing, Jilin, and Heilongjiang so they could survey their provincial capitals and surrounding areas. They were supposed to measure the distance between the places and the provincial capitals, to check if places had changed their names, and to see if there were any famous mountains, rivers, and stories connected to these places about the Manchu ancestors. They would then compile a single map of the three provinces.

The officials followed Qianlong's order and surveyed north-eastern China. They used one of the Qianlong editions of the *Overview Maps of Imperial Territories* (see Mario Cams' essay in this issue) as the basis for their new map and through this large-scale investigation, more than 700 places were identified, which had not been indicated on the *Overview Maps*. On 20 May 1776, the Shengjing governor-general Hong Shang 弘昇 (1718–1781), sent a folded draft map of the three provinces Shengjing, Jilin, and Heilongjiang to the emperor, with red labels affixed to places in Shengjing, pink labels affixed to places in Jilin, and white labels affixed to places in Heilongjiang. The Qianlong emperor decreed, "Use the draft of the map of places such as Shengjing and Jilin [as a base] for drawing a comprehensive map, and make annotations on the map describing the various [military] achievements [of the Manchu people] in Manchu and Chinese".[1]

The main editors of this map, the ministers Šuhede (1710–1777), Agūi (1717–1797), and Ingliyan (1707–1783) proposed to enlarge the dimensions of the map. They sent the following memorial in the summer of 1776, suggesting a format that was eventually used for the annotations of military deeds: "... All the achievements that happened at certain places [mentioned] on the map will be described [as a note] under the respective place name with the year and month the achievement took place indicated".[2]

The note next to Sarhū Mountain, for example, reads: "In the third month of the fourth year Tianming 天命 [April/May 1619], 470,000 Ming soldiers came to attack from different directions and so Emperor Taizu 太祖 [Nurhaci, 1559–1626] gathered 60,000 soldiers in this place".

The editors combined 2,313 place names – of which over 700 appeared on a map for the first time – with 144 annotations in both Manchu and Chinese. It took them two years to complete the map project and in May 1778, the Map Bureau [*Yutu fang* 輿圖房] requested compensation for the work. By that time, Šuhede had already passed away, so Agūi had become the minister in charge of the project. Two months later, in July 1778, Agūi, together with other ministers presented the map to the emperor. The *Map of Military Deeds* was handed over to the Hall of Military Excellence [*Wuying dian* 武英殿] for publication in March 1779 and was subsequently printed.

This map made by the Qing government added more than a third of place names compared to previous maps. This way, the north-eastern borderlands became much better known and the map is a valuable document for studying Qing dynasty knowledge of the borderlands and the place names of the people at the north-eastern border.

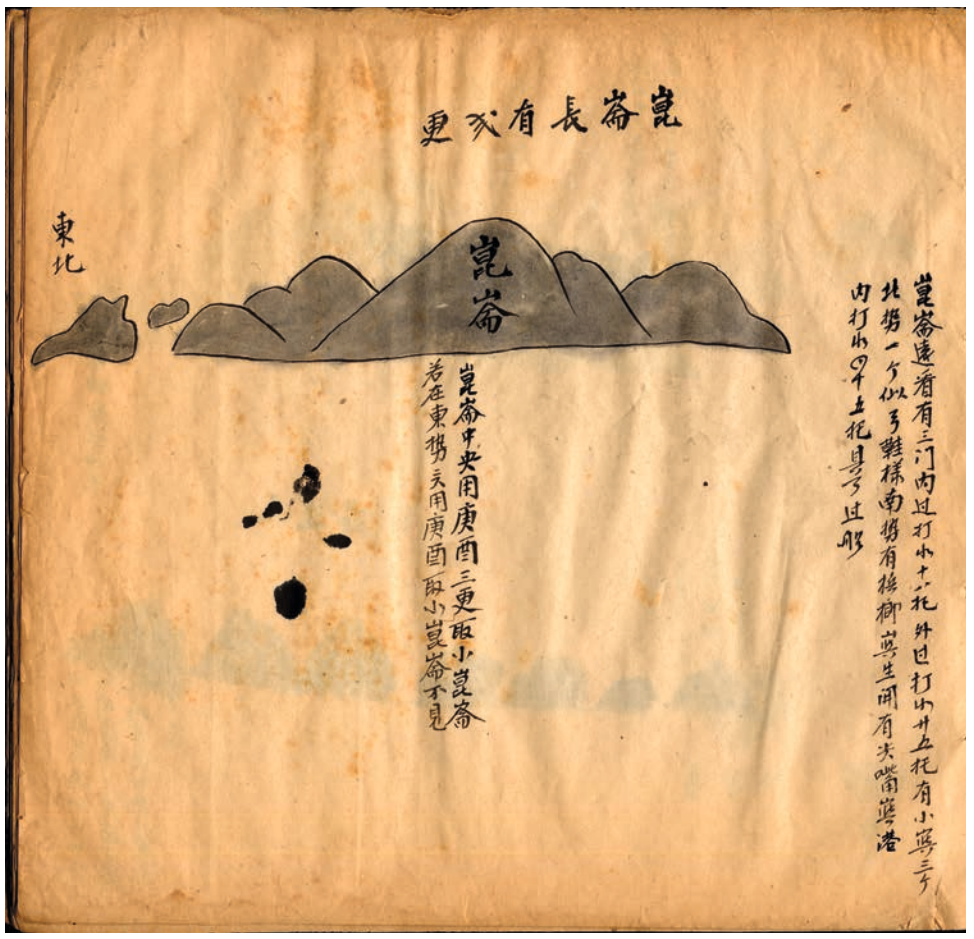

Fig.4: One sheet of the Yale Maps showing the important navigational landmark Côn Sơn Island. Courtesy Yale University Library.

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1 First Historical Archives of China, memorial 05-08-030-000007-0033, 1778.
2 idem.