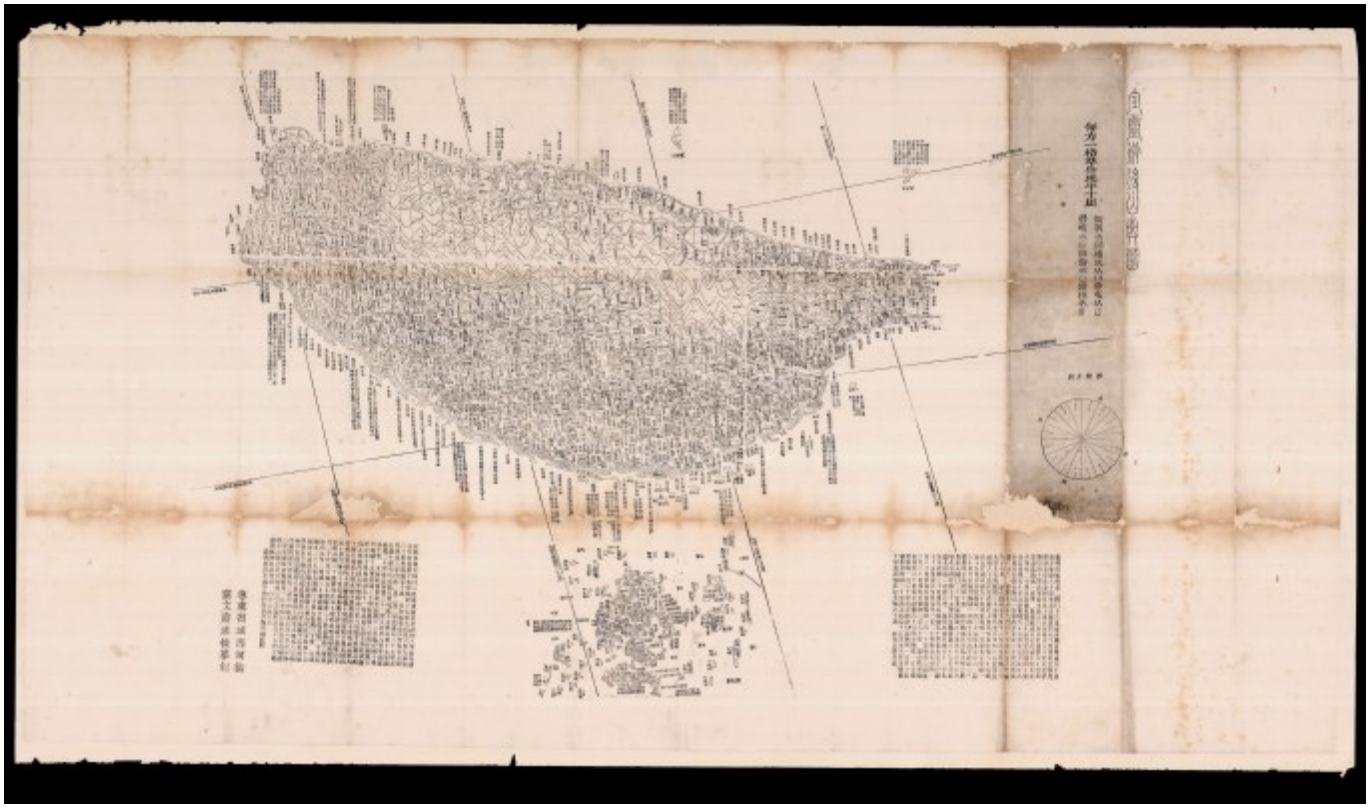


Woodblock print in black ink, several areas of loss, skilfully infilled with paper pulp repair, browning along old fold in lower portion of map, laid on japan paper support.

THE FIRST OFFICIAL QING DYNASTY MAP TO DEPICT THE ENTIRE ISLAND OF TAIWAN, INCLUDING ITS EASTERN TERRITORIES

Complete Map of the Front and Rear Mountains of Taiwan (全臺前後山輿圖 Quan Tai Qianhou Shan Yutu)

Author
Yu Chong (Qing dynasty)

Publication date
4th year of the Guangxu reign (1878)

Publisher

Publication place
[Taiwan],

Physical description
Woodblock print in black ink, several areas of loss, skilfully infilled with paper pulp repair, browning along old fold in lower portion of map, laid on japan paper support.

Dimensions
835 by 1540mm. (32.75 by 60.75 inches).

Notes
The first official Qing dynasty map to depict the entire island of Taiwan, including its eastern territories.

The Complete Map of the Front and Rear Mountains of Taiwan (全臺前後山輿圖) was carved and printed by Fuwen Studio富文斋in Guangzhou in the fourth year of the Guangxu reign (1878), more than 140 years ago. Fuwen Studio, located on Xihu Street in the provincial capital of Guangdong (present-day Guangzhou), was renowned for its fine engraving and printing skills, continuing the province's distinguished book-carving tradition dating back to the Ming dynasty.

The map title, Quan Tai Qianhou Shan Yutu 全臺前後山輿圖, is inscribed at the upper right, with a note beside it reading, "Each square equals ten li on level ground." Symbols and legends indicate the various administrative divisions. The map combines a grid of latitude and longitude with the traditional li-based square-grid system, using Beijing as the prime meridian. The east coast of Taiwan is placed at the top, with north to the left. Two mileage tables, Front Mountain Routes and Rear Mountain Routes, are attached to the lower left and right corners, listing contemporary place names and road distances across the island's western and eastern sides.

Rendered in fine line work, the map depicts the entire island of Taiwan and the Pescadores (Penghu Islands), showing mountain ranges, rivers, settlements, and roads. Coastal islands, harbours, tidal marks, anchorage depths, and military garrisons are carefully annotated. The inscription reads: "Drawn and engraved under the supervision of Yu Chong, commissioned in the year of Guangxu wuyin (4th year, 1878), Jia Ping. Carved by Fuwen Studio, Xihu Street, Guangdong Provincial Capital."

Historical Context and Significance
In 1874 (the thirteenth year of Tongzhi), following the Mudan Incident, Japan attempted to occupy Taiwan's mountainous region under the pretext of terra nullius ("unclaimed land"), launching a punitive expedition against Indigenous groups. The event prompted the Qing government to abandon its long-standing "closed-mountain" policy and adopt an "open-mountain and pacify-the-savages" approach. Shen Baozhen was dispatched to Taiwan to strengthen defences against Japan, while the island's administrative divisions were redrawn and three new counties—Hengchun, Puli, and Beinan—were established to assert Qing sovereignty over the entire island.
It was in this context that the Qing court commissioned the first complete map of Taiwan to include the eastern territories—the Complete Map of the Front and Rear Mountains of Taiwan, published in 1878. The project was supervised by Xia Xianlun, then Military Commissioner of Taiwan, who sent survey teams across the island. Xia personally reviewed the final drawings, which were executed and engraved under Yu Chong's direction and later printed by Fuwen Studio in Guangzhou.

The scroll-format map was produced primarily for administrative and military purposes. It combined li-based square plotting with latitude-longitude coordinates, again using Beijing as the longitudinal origin. Besides geographical features, it marks government offices, garrisons, aboriginal settlements, forts, guard posts, and mountain routes. The western half of the map is relatively accurate, while the eastern half shows notable distortion—an effect of the limited number of surveyed control points concentrated in the west.

According to Lai Jin-Gui, Huang Qing-Qi, and Yeh Kao-Hua in "Exploring Spatial Cognition in Historical Maps: A Case Study of the 1878 Complete Map of the Front and Rear Mountains of Taiwan" (Journal of Geographical Science, Taipei, no. 42, 2005), when the 1878 map is digitised and overlaid with modern cartography, the western region aligns closely with actual topography, whereas the eastern region appears deformed. The enlarged depiction of the Penghu Islands underscores their strategic importance in Taiwan's coastal defence.

Later Developments and Related Editions
In 1880 (the sixth year of Guangxu), under Xia Xianlun's continued supervision, Yu Chong and his team completed the Taiwan Atlas (臺湾輿圖), consisting of twelve sheets: one general map of the

front and rear mountains and eleven county-level maps. The 1878 Complete Map of the Front and Rear Mountains of Taiwan was thus an earlier, single-sheet forerunner of that larger atlas.

Although the two works are closely related, they differ in certain details—particularly in the depiction of the Puli Six Communities, variations in place-name orthography, and minor differences in symbols and annotations. Nevertheless, the 1878 map vividly marks a turning point in Qing cartography and governance: for the first time, the court conceived of Taiwan's western ("front mountain") and eastern ("rear mountain") regions as a single, governable whole, initiating systematic surveying and laying the groundwork for the administration of eastern Taiwan.

Rarity
Only three institutional examples of this 1878 edition have been traced — in the Library of Congress (Washington, D.C.), the Taipei City Archives, and the Taiwan Historica in Nantou.

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Provenance

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