ARTICLE

Qing China and Its Offshore Islands in the Long Eighteenth Century

Ronald C. Po

Department of International History, London School of Economics, London, UK
Email: c.y.po@lse.ac.uk

Abstract

A significant paradigm shift in the examination of China's engagement with the maritime world has taken place over the past decade. The conventional image of the Qing dynasty in the long eighteenth century as being merely land-orientated has now become obsolete. Historians are no longer satisfied with this stereotype and have put aside the conception that the Qing only realized the importance of strategic marine governance after the First Opium War. In view of this historiographical turn, I seek to deepen our understanding of the Great Qing in relation to the sea. By focusing on a series of sea charts, alongside some relevant palace papers, from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, I will argue that the Qing's process of locating and charting those offshore islands was an essential, indicative, and demonstrative step for the central authority to project its imperial power onto the waters off the coast of China long before the arrival of Western gunboats in the age of global rivalry.

<H1>I

More than 10,100 offshore islands punctuate China's coastline.[1] Among them, one can find barren islets adorned with dilapidated remnants or ancient inscriptions, as well as islands bustling with industrious communities. Some are situated in estuarine regions or amid mud-fields, separated by expansive wetlands, while others are nestled within intricate and perilous water systems, contributing to a complex and multifaceted maritime landscape.[2] In his travel writing entitled *China and Japan*, Lieutenant James Douglas Johnston (1817–96) recorded his experience of journeying throughout some of these small islands in the nineteenth century,

<extract>

> We did not get a glimpse of the sun from the day we left Hong Kong until we sighted the Chusan group of islands, a little to the southward of Ningpo – though we navigated so accurately by the outlying islands, and prominent points on the coast, as to lose no time in entering the narrow passage between the two southernmost of this group, in which we contended about ten hours against the almost overpowering strength of the fearful tides, rushing in various directions around and among them.[3]

<\extract>

Despite the dangers inherent in sailing through those 'outlying islands', the seascape attributed to them was astonishing, as Johnston continued to commented that 'the hillsides and valleys of these beautiful islands are cultivated in every available spot by the industrious people to whom they belong'.[4] Prior to Johnston, earlier European authors such as George Leonard Staunton (1737–1801), William Winterbotham (1763–1829), and Clement Cruttwell (1743–1808) also documented the existence of numerous outlying islands off the coast of China.[5] While there are intriguing historical records and writings about these islands, the field of island studies has long overlooked imperial China, particularly during its early modern era in the long eighteenth century. Meanwhile, the history of China's islands was rarely featured, if at all, in mainstream

histories of the country.[6] The governance, military involvement, and maritime connections of these offshore islands appear only marginally in some of the well-known studies of the period.[7] After all, in a Chinese context, islands had often been considered mythical, marginal, distant, inferior, or even isolated spaces.[8] Perhaps the only few exceptions are Taiwan, Hainan Island, the Penghu Islands, and Nanao Island off the coast of Guangdong province. But for maritime historians studying the Asian Pacific region, the smaller, lesser-important islands are rarely on the radar. In this article, however, I seek to assert that the Qing state emerged as the earliest governing entity to commit extensive attention to the collective offshore and outlying islands, while also systematically recognizing their integral role within the maritime frontier. Such argument can underscore the recent paradigm shift in the examination of China's engagement with the maritime world, highlighting that the Qing was not exclusively land-focused. Furthermore, I propose that the Qing approach towards coastal islands could mirror its broader frontier policies during the early modern era, a time when the empire was experiencing its zenith of expansion both on land and at sea.

Before delving into my propositions, we have to understand why there has not been sufficient focus on eighteenth-century China's offshore islands. Essentially, there are three underlying reasons. First, the conception of islands in imperial China was usually associated with mythology, barbarity, and inferiority. In the Daoist context, for instance, they were always perceived as a mythical uncertainty, and on certain occasions they might have been thought to carry some spiritual and therapeutic energy within themselves.[9] Their inferiority and barbarity were also apparent in a number of political discourses. Even Taiwan, the biggest island off the South China coast, was considered by scholar-officials during most of the eighteenth century as a less civilized 'ball of mud' located on the fringe of the empire.[10] Its value and importance remained a debatable subject for a while after the island was annexed by the Kangxi emperor in 1683. In the words of Emma Teng, a renowned historian in the field, 'the Qing empire had

not intended to acquire Taiwan permanently, so in effect, the annexation was an accidental colonization rather than a colonization by design'.[11]

Another reason why island management in imperial China has often been overlooked is that the Ming government had a policy of relinquishing these islands in naval matters.[12] This leads to the impression that the Qing court in the eighteenth century followed Ming maritime management.[13] While there may seem to be continuity in coastal defence, the Qing dynasty had a more proactive approach to managing small islands near the coast compared to the Ming.

In a memorial submitted by Sun Chun (1724–95), the general of Shengjing appointed by the Qianlong emperor in 1789, it was reported that coastal residents had initiated a migration to various offshore islands, including Jiaohua Island, situated off the coast of the city of Jinzhou in Northeast China, during the early years of the Shunzhi era (1644–61). This movement resulted in a substantial population on the islands, as indicated by Qing records, with 58 elderly individuals and 436 men and women of working age residing there. Additionally, this period saw the construction of 317 houses and 2 temples on the islands.[14] The Qing approach to migrants represented a notable departure from Ming policies, as it acknowledged their imperial subject status and conducted meticulous population documentation. Islanders were integrated into the imperial community under the Qing, and their careful population recording exemplified this commitment. Conversely, during most of the Ming, islanders were marginalized, and comprehensive surveys or detailed records were absent.

Island historians suggest that 'Islands are bounded entities in a way that continental cultures are not.'[15] Grant McCall argues that 'There is a clear ideological, if not practical division between an in-group and an out-group: us and them, for islanders.'[16] For the inhabitants who settled on those islands off the coast of China in the eighteenth century, however, this divide appears to be less applicable simply because those islands were closely attached to the mainland economically and culturally. Individuals who lived on those islands

were also monitored by the respective provincial governments and their navies deployed by the Qing court. As a result, they could hardly develop a kind of differentiation between themselves as 'islanders' and the central regime as 'others'. At least it was very rare to see any domestic revolt occur on the habitable, small offshore islands.

The final reason these islands were neglected is because imperial and local files contain few textual sources recording offshore island management. This disparity becomes particularly evident when comparing the volume of records related to inland frontier governance. Although historical records do offer glimpses into the management of these islands throughout the history of imperial China, many of these archives are characterized by brevity and lack precision. Nonetheless, it is important to clarify that the absence of comprehensive documentation does not always imply a lack of official interest in the islands and their inhabitants.

In fact, historical accounts trace the presence of people residing on offshore islands back to the Han dynasty, during which they were initially referred to as 'barbarians of the islets (*daoyi*)'.[17] It was not until the Song dynasty that these island inhabitants received more accurate and impartial designations such as 'island people (*daoren*)' or 'island citizens (*daomin*)'.[18] During the early Ming, the government made efforts to enlist islanders into the navy.[19] However, this policy shifted in the fifteenth century when the government's perception of these island residents changed in conjunction with the adoption of an inward-looking approach that distanced itself from the sea. They began to be categorized as raiders or outlaws. According to the Ming writer Wei Huan, as documented in his *Jiubian tongkao*:

<extract>

> In the southeastern region of the Liaodong Peninsula, one finds majestic mountains and an expansive sea. Scattered amidst this sea are islands where individuals congregate, referred to as islanders, while within the heart of these mountains, dwell mountain-dwelling people. These populations consist largely

of refugees from diverse origins, sustaining themselves independently and unfamiliar with the government's regulations. If left unattended, they have the potential to disrupt societal order, leading to unforeseen perils. Enforcing legal measures upon them may inadvertently provoke unrest.[20]

<\extract>

In contrast to the Ming policies, the Qing court recognized the islanders as integral citizens of the empire. Even during the sea blockade era (*haijin*) in the late seventeenth century, as documented in the *Penglai gazetteer*, islanders who were compelled to relocate inland were still 'acknowledged' as taxable subjects, with some exceptions granted from head tax payments in particularly dire circumstances.[21] In 1672, those who resisted relocation, violated regulations, or migrated to distant outlying islands were considered lawbreakers,

<extract>

Residents of the islands are typically instructed to relocate inland to mitigate the potential of providing refuge and support to the criminals (i.e. the Zheng's force in Taiwan). Individuals who persist in living and cultivating land on these islands will be subject to legal measures related to the smuggling of forbidden goods for international trade. Authorities will uphold a state of vigilance and adjudicate cases accordingly.[22]

<\extract>

Essentially, during the enforcement of the sea blockade policy, the Qing government's attention extended beyond the coastal inhabitants and seafaring vessels. It also encompassed those residing on offshore islands, making them one of the facets of the broader scenario. It is worth noting, however, that efforts to entirely depopulate these islands faced significant challenges. The Zheng's force in Taiwan, in most cases working with pirates and smugglers, routinely exploited these seemingly uninhabited areas as strategic bases, from which they

launched attacks on the Qing navy and recruited individuals who were opposed to the *haijin* policy.[23] In other words, the Kangxi administration encountered a range of difficulties in consistently maintaining control over these ostensibly vacant islands in the sea.

Following the annexation of Taiwan in 1683, the Kangxi emperor issued a renowned imperial edict to 'open the sea (*kaihai*)'. This decree signals that individuals who had previously inhabited offshore islands were now permitted to return to their places of origin (*zhaoling haidao qianmin fuye, haijin dakai*).[24] An example of such opening can be found in the *Xinning fuzhi* (*Xinning gazetteer*), which states, 'in the spring of the twenty-third year of the Kangxi reign, during the Jiazi month, high-ranking officials were dispatched to oversee and govern county-level institutions, facilitating the reopening and reclamation of five islands in the sea'.[25] These five specified islands – Mangzhou, Xiachuan, Shangchuan, Da Jinshan, and Xiao Jinshan – were all situated off the coast of Xinning county, with a recorded population of 1,840 individuals.[26]

The Qing court viewed the offshore islands not only as inhabited by its subjects but also as strategically vital for bolstering the defence of its maritime frontier. Several outlying islands, such as Naozhou, Chongming, Zhoushan, Yuhuan, and Haitan, were garrisoned with soldiers and equipped with basic naval infrastructure to serve this purpose.[27] The Yongzheng emperor exhibited even greater commitment to bringing these islands under the purview of maritime control. The *Shandong fuzhi* (*Shandong gazetteer*), for example, delineated eight specific strategic locations at sea, where islands played a certain role,

<extract>

> Dangerous rapids (*xianxun*): Two mountains converge, with treacherous waters filled with jagged rocks and unpredictable winds and tides; suitable for establishing checkpoints.

Critical rapids (*yaoxun*): Where multiple routes converge with no other alternatives; suitable for garrisoning heavy troops.

Choke rapids (*chongxun*): Where travel is inevitable and serves as a designated stopping point; suitable for defensive fortifications.

Convergence rapids (*huixun*): Located centrally, controlling various routes for gathering forces; suitable for establishing military gates.

Idle rapids (*xianxun*): Where tides ebb and flow, with narrow channels unsuitable for anchoring ships; suitable for setting up blockhouses.

Scattered rapids (*sanxun*): Islands and islets along the way, offering temporary refuge from storms; suitable for patrols.

Detour rapids (*yuxun*): Wind-sheltered entrances and exits, unrelated to the main route; suitable for watchtowers.

Remote rapids (*pixun*): Meandering tributaries, tucked away in a corner; suitable for reconnaissance.[28]

<\extract>

In brief, in the Yongzheng era, offshore islands were deliberately featured in maritime control strategies, particularly in scenarios related to 'dangerous rapids', 'scattered rapids', and 'detour rapids'. They served as essential elements for navigation, defence, troop deployment, and sea anchors. These islands not only helped secure and oversee crucial points along sea routes but also held significant importance in seamlessly incorporating a substantial portion of the inner sea into the broader framework of maritime security and control. This is among the key factors contributing to the inclusion of these offshore islands on the sea charts under examination in due course. By incorporating this 'rapids logic' in their depiction, these maps provided viewers with a straightforward understanding of the coastal situation. In short, depending on their locations and geological features, these islands served as crucial links, connecting the

protection of coastal areas with the security of vital maritime routes. In so doing, they significantly enhanced the Qing's overall capacity for maritime defence and control.

In addition to their geostrategic importance, there was also a notable degree of development in some of these offshore islands throughout the long eighteenth century, even though the population size on most offshore islands remained small. The inhabitants of these islands were granted the privilege of engaging in seaborne trade and fishing within specific designated areas, mirroring the economic activities of those living along the coastal mainland. In the early Qing, island residents were subject to a head tax, and during the Yongzheng era, after a tax reform, those who owned farmland on these islands were liable for a land tax. As reported by Tian Wenjing, one of the most trustable officials appointed by the Yongzheng emperor, islanders not only participated in seafaring activities but were also actively involved in agriculture.[29] Moreover, it is worth noting that during the Kangxi and Yongzheng eras (1661–1735), there was a significant influx of people migrating to some of these offshore islands. However, at that time, there were no specific laws governing or regulating such migrations.[30] It was not until 1747 that the central government instituted regulations prohibiting mainlanders from establishing cultivation on offshore islands without prior permission.[31] This signals the evolving administrative measures and policies designed to regulate the interaction between the mainland and these peripheral islands during the high Qing, which stands in stark contrast to the Ming.

Notwithstanding the textual sources mentioned above, it is worth reiterating that the records concerning island management are often sketchy and lacking in depth. They do not provide a comprehensive understanding of how outlying islands fit into the broader framework of maritime defence. Furthermore, many of the islands mentioned in these textual records were within specific local contexts and relatively obscure. Consequently, historians might find it tricky when locating these islands accurately without the aid of maps or similar visual

representations. Even with the assistance of contemporary atlases, some of these places may have had different names in the past. In addition, compared with the very rich density of documentation that touches on the legal, political, administrative, military, and even religious history of the Qing's land frontier, governors and proprietors who settled along the coast left few traces of their dealings with those offshore islands. Almost no serious books and essays on the status and experiences of those lesser islands and their inhabitants were published during the High Qing. These problems, in turn, led to another underlying objective of this article, which is to encourage researchers and readers to pay more attention to the existing visual historical materials, namely the sea charts or coastal diagrams (*haitu* in Chinese) produced in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in order to piece the puzzle together. In this manner, we should be able not only to visualize the significance of offshore islands within specific local contexts but also to acquire deeper insights into the Qing approach to island management during that era.

<H1>II

In the following sections, I will draw upon a collection of visual materials, specifically sea charts that I have referred to as maritime diagrams (*haitu*), to complement our understanding of island management during the Great Qing. Rather unexpectedly, most of these sea charts, largely untapped by historians, are not preserved in China or Taiwan but at the British Library in the United Kingdom. These charts are symbolic and significant not only due to their rarity but also because they are more direct, lively, illustrative, and, to a substantial extent, more informative than many other textual sources of the time, which allow us to enrich our comprehension of the history of maritime management in the High Qing. Yet before delving into the specific details of these archival materials, we still need to theorize and better orientate

them academically. There is a difference, in the word of the Tongan and Fijian anthropologist Epeli Hau‘ofa (1939–2009), to viewing maps and charts as historical evidence portraying ‘islands in the maritime space’ or ‘a maritime space of islands’.[32] The former emphasizes territory that is a dry surface in a sea distant from the centres of power. According to this perspective, islands are supposedly remote, detached, and insignificant. The latter conception, ‘a maritime space of islands’, by contrast, directs us to a more holistic picture in which islands are taken into consideration in the totality of a geographical space. In such a case, islands are crucial in the formation of political, economic, military, and cultural realities.

By focusing on the layout and details of those *haitu* produced in the eighteenth century from the second ideological point of view, we will realize that the Qing empire was capable of formulating its maritime vision and strategy on its own terms, while the Europeans were also formulating their own approaches to their sea spaces within particular historical and cultural settings. Continental powers with coastal territories, as noted by John Connell and Robert Aldrich, have often viewed their island colonies as ‘windows on the world’.[33] In the Atlantic world, for example, Portugal, the Netherlands, and Spain have all claimed control over islands, whether offshore or not.[34] Although China is not mentioned in Connell and Aldrich’s studies, it is about time to put aside the conception that this Asian giant failed to realize the importance of its offshore islands and, by extension, its maritime frontier, during the early modern era.

This article discusses ten selected sea charts, with the majority held at the British Library unless otherwise specified (see full list in the appendix). As we will see, these sea charts collectively reflect the Qing perspective on offshore islands as integral components of its maritime frontier. While these islands may have been small in size, their significance, both strategically and economically, was not overlooked by the Qing authority. A closer examination of the sea charts reveals their deliberate efforts to establish a connection between these offshore islands and the coastal regions, and by extension, the mainland itself. This

approach was motivated by the overarching goals of enhancing coastal management and bolstering national security. In essence, the process of locating and charting these offshore islands played a pivotal role in projecting Qing power across the Asian seas during the long eighteenth century.

Before delving into the detailed discussion of these sea charts, we should note that larger mapping projects like the Kangxi Atlas (1721), *Jingban tianwen quantu* (1790), and the *DaQing wannian yitong dili quantu* (1814), known as the 'blue map', occasionally depict islands. However, these grand projects primarily provide an overview of the empire as a whole, focusing on well-known islands like Taiwan and Hainan, while smaller offshore islands are not extensively detailed or included. Similarly, in various geographical accounts concerning maritime defence, such as the frequently referenced *Yangfang jiyao* by Yan Ruyi (1759–1826), while certain offshore islands received attention,[35] the smaller and less-known outlying islands discussed in this article were notably absent from these representations. As a result, despite their significance, they do not paint a comprehensive picture. We would need to rely on those sea charts preserved at the British Library, which are more locally focused and specified.

<H1>III

The sea charts I have chosen for this section primarily serve as tools for political control through the interpretation of maps. The first example is titled *Shandong, Zhili, Shengjing Haijiang tu* (Figure 1), which was produced during the Shuzhi era. This *haitu* is probably one of the earliest surviving examples of sea charts that were drawn during the early Qing. Although the sea chart itself is not very detailed, some key islands off the coast of the northern part of the Shandong peninsula are visibly pictured. Moreover, the passage written on this *haitu*

is also worthy of our attention. It clearly shows that ‘these (offshore) islands were labelled as hubs, hideouts, or lairs, where pirates would hide themselves’. During the prosperous long eighteenth century, piracy remained a concern for the Qing government, much like the Ming dynasty. The empire’s vast 14,500 km coastline faced chronic disturbances from both petty and organized pirates. Some remote islands attracted pirates who used them as bases or storage for their plunder. To enhance coastal security, these islands needed monitoring. This defensive shift from the Ming era, which primarily focused on coastal regions with beacons and towers, was significant.<Figure 1 near here>

[INSERT FIGURE 1]

Two other examples that exhibit similar characteristic are the *Changshi shuishiying neiwaiyang yutu* (Figure 2), and the *Pingyangying yanhai jiezhitu* (Figure 3). Both of them were produced in the 1730s, during the reign of the Yongzheng emperor. Like the first example, these two sea charts appear to be a bit sketchy, but they depict key islands in their correct locations. Figure 2 provides insights into island distances from each other and from Wenzhou on the mainland. Although lacking grid systems or precise measurements, these charts are notably accurate. Some islands are marked as bustling commercial hubs and ports facilitating trade along the Chinese coastline. As maritime activity increased following the lifting of the sea ban in 1684, island mariners near Wenzhou played a significant role in regional fisheries and local trade. This maritime boom enriched coastal communities and offshore island inhabitants. However, the Qing court had concerns about fishermen potentially turning to piracy due to their seafaring expertise, prompting the need for fishing regulations. These regulations encompassed various

edges, including the standardization of vessel sizes and the types of instruments permitted on board. In the official Qing statues *DaQing huidian*, for instance, it was stated clearly that

<extract>

> In the forty-second year (of the Kangxi era), fishing vessels for marine use were once again allowed. They were restricted to single masts, with the beam not exceeding one *zhang*, while the number of crew members, including helmsmen and sailors, were limited to twenty people. Fishing activities were prohibited from crossing provincial boundaries. Before constructing a vessel, the relevant authorities in the prefecture and county required a detailed report, including information about the boat owner, household, village head, and neighbours, and these individuals were required to sign and provide guarantees. Only after this process was completed, and the vessel's construction date reported and verified by local officials, was it allowed to be built. The vessel's details, including the names and marks of the people involved, as well as the helmsmen and sailors, were recorded and sealed. Additionally, the boat owner, helmsmen, and sailors' ages, appearances, and hometowns were listed in the records for ease of inspection at various ports and locations.[36]

<\extract>

In order to strengthen the oversight of fishermen and align with the directives mentioned earlier, the creation of comprehensive sea charts takes on crucial significance. Such detailed charts serve as a pragmatic instrument for local officials and the navy, enabling them to demarcate specific fishing zones where activities are permitted. With this vital information visually represented, the navy and local officials can significantly enhance their ability to monitor and enforce the established regulations. This, in turn, ensures fishermen's compliance with the

prescribed standards and boundaries for their maritime activities, facilitating efficient governance of the coastal regions.<Figures 2 and 3 near here>

Following the lifting of the late seventeenth-century sea ban, maritime provinces like Zhejiang, Fujian, and Guangdong witnessed a gradual migration outflow.[37] While not necessarily leading to increased island settlements, it did boost trade and traffic across various marine regions, including the Bohai Sea, Yellow Sea, Taiwan Strait, and northern South China Sea. Consequently, the central government became more involved in island affairs. This is evident from the sea charts, where fortifications strengthened, troop numbers increased, and designated sea areas required enhanced surveillance and policing. During the Yongzheng era, officials with civilian titles like *xunjian* (patrol) and *tongpan* (lawsuit) were appointed to oversee local affairs on select offshore islands, as exemplified in Hao Yulin's 1731 memorial, governor general of Guangdong at the time,

<extract>

> The vast expanse of the Huangliang region includes remote islands, situated far from the county seat, where there are no government clerks stationed. It is challenging for local officials to oversee this area effectively, and there is a risk of unlawful activities going undetected. Therefore, I request the appointment of an additional inspector to be stationed there for effective supervision and control.[38]

<\extract>

Four years later (in 1735), Yang Yongbin (1670–1740), the inspector-general of Guangdong, also raised a similar issue,

<extract>

> The Longmen district is located seventy *li* (Chinese miles) from the city by land and over thirty *li* by sea. It is an isolated island area with a growing population,

currently comprising over a thousand households. The local magistrate and officials find it challenging to govern from a distance. Although there are inspectors, their presence is primarily for flood defence, and they do not address civil matters. It is necessary to station government clerks there for close and direct administration.[39]

<\extract>

The practice of appointing administrators to offshore islands persisted during the Qianlong reign. In 1769, for example, a *xunjian* was designated to oversee local affairs on Qiao Island in Xiangshan county.[40] Considering the intensification of island control since the Yongzheng era, the emergence of those specific sea charts was arguably the consequence of this strategic shift in governance. All of the enhancements, as shown on those *haitu*, were implemented with the primary objective of maintaining tranquillity and stability along the maritime frontier.

Sailing distance and duration are critical for maritime policing, logistics, and security efficiency. Examining sea charts such as *Xiangshan chengshou yingxuntu* (Figure 4) and *Wenzhouzhen biaozhongying haixun yutu* (Figure 5) from the Yongzheng era (1730 and 1731) provides insights into how they depicted and visualized sea routes. These charts meticulously portrayed island distances, aiding strategic planning by helping authorities gauge travel time and allocate resources effectively. They also depicted navigational challenges between the coast and offshore islands, essential for safe voyages and security responses. The charts included comparative island sizes, highlighting topographical variations and aiding navigation.<Figures 4 and 5 near here>

The sixth example, *Ningbofu liuyi ji haidao yangtu* (Figure 6), was completed later, in the early nineteenth century, but before the outbreak of the First Opium War. This sea chart is both representative and figurative of the Qing's view of its sea space as hundreds of islands are clearly located and labelled on the parchment. More importantly, red lines divide this particular

sea space into various segments, each of which includes at least from ten to twenty offshore islands. Apparently, this demonstrates that those identified small islands mattered in the Qing court's naval agenda carrying certain geostrategic value. They were strategic sites within a carefully crafted structure of frontier management related to the sea. This is also evident if we turn to the *Yuhuan zuoyou liangying xunyutu* (Figure 7), compiled in 1807. Coastal stability and national security were significantly influenced by the safeguarding of these islands. Apart from the red lines clearly demarcating areas of strategic importance on the two sea charts, a multitude of remarks were inscribed throughout (as seen in Figure 7). These annotations specifically designated which islands were to be patrolled and managed by the respective naval authorities. The inclusion of these remarks served as invaluable practical guidance for coastal governors and naval commanders, enabling them to administer the domestic sea space efficiently and effectively. Above all, this attention to detail played a decisive role in deterring potential threats and keeping the enemy at bay.<Figures 6 and 7 near here>

In his 'Coming onto the map', James Millward offers a compelling perspective on the multifaceted role of maps. He not only considers them as tools for political control but also as cultural and ideological artefacts that reflect the creators' perceptions of space, history, identity, and so forth. Millward explores the reasons driving the early and mid-Qing emperors' aspirations and financial support for the completion of a comprehensive survey and mapping project concerning the north-west frontier.[41] Intriguingly, this vision for meticulous mapping and comprehensive geographical understanding aligns with the Qing approach to the creation of sea charts, as discussed above. These maritime charts reveal a similar vision, demonstrating the Qing's commitment to systematically charting and comprehending its maritime territories and the coastal regions beyond. Such shared dedication to geographic knowledge underscores the significance of maps as powerful tools in shaping state policies, fostering a maritime identity, and asserting control over both terrestrial and watery domains.

All of the features shown on the above sea charts are remarkable, but we have to understand that, for several practical reasons, islands were difficult to chart or map in the early modern era. Before anything else, sailors had to be trained in chart making, which is an education not everyone could access. When the mapmakers were at sea, they faced countless limitations of weather, sailing machinery, instruments, and navigational technology; as a result, the inability to calculate and measure the distances between the coast and those islands offshore was only one of the many challenges the cartographers had to try to overcome. After the voyage, the next and probably most essential step was to transfer the information gathered from on board their ship to the publishing house. This transmission of knowledge might have been complicated by many factors, including the danger of losing the precise geographical locations of those islands in the sea. It was not an easy task to precisely and neatly place those offshore islands on a sea chart in the long eighteenth century. The mapmakers could, of course, rely on some of the existing local knowledge, but I would argue that the cartographers in the Qing also had to set sail for those offshore islands; the charts produced in the High Qing were more up to date than those available from previous dynasties. In other words, the Qing's cartographers would not have been able to complete those projects if they had solely consulted published geographical records or earlier materials. Yet how these sea charts of the High Qing were produced requires further examination. There is no written evidence so far that can tell us how these *haitu* were drawn so carefully and accurately.[42]

<H1>IV

The mapping projects we have encountered were not exclusive to the Qing empire. There are various examples of maps and charts produced during the Song and Ming dynasties showing the locations of offshore islands.[43] However, sea charts produced in the Qing are more detailed

and sophisticated than the ones completed in earlier times, not to mention the fact that the Qing charts were usually fashioned in a more artistic and colourful way. One fundamental aspect is the heightened level of geographical precision found in Qing charts. These charts tend to depict coastlines and geographical features, including bays, peninsulas, and river estuaries, with greater accuracy, showcasing advancements in mapping techniques. This precision extends to the depiction of islands, where Qing cartographers demonstrated a remarkable ability to accurately locate and represent even smaller islets and rocks in their correct positions relative to the main landmass. An illustrative example can be seen in the Coastal Map of China (*Haijiang yangjie xingshi quantu*).[44] Unlike earlier Ming charts, which somehow generalized the shape of islands or depicted them in approximate locations, this respective *quantu* meticulously represented each island as well as its size and exact position. This level of precision not only aided navigation but also underscored the advanced mapping techniques employed.

Furthermore, Qing sea charts distinguish themselves through their extensive paratextual information, which underlines their advanced and nuanced approach to conveying vital navigational details. These charts go beyond mere geographical representations; they serve as comprehensive guides for a wide range of users, from officials and naval commanders to seasoned mariners navigating treacherous waters. Embedded within these charts are intricate and highly detailed representations of navigational hazards that would give even the most experienced sailors pause. Submerged rocks, often rendered with meticulous precision, are depicted with remarkable accuracy, allowing mariners to pinpoint their exact locations and avoid potential shipwrecks. Treacherous reefs, some marked with symbols denoting their presence, serve as conspicuous warnings to navigators, ensuring they keep a safe distance from these natural hazards. Perilous shallows, often rendered with contour lines and soundings,

provide invaluable depth information, enabling sailors to assess the underwater topography and make informed decisions about their routes.

As a matter of fact, a perceptible shift in maritime policy and coastal management occurred as the Qing dynasty took a more proactive and deliberate approach compared to the Ming, evident in the comparative analysis of their respective sea charts. This transition marked a significant elevation in the Qing recognition of the strategic significance of coastal territories. In essence, Qing sea charts exhibited a remarkable advancement in geographical precision, providing mariners with more accurate depictions of coastlines, islands, and various geographical features. Additionally, these charts introduced a more extensive array of symbols and paratextual materials, signifying an enhanced capacity to convey both administrative and navigational information effectively. Collectively, these advancements underscored the Qing court's commitment to promoting safer navigation and maritime governance, representing a perceptible departure from the earlier Ming era characterized by a relatively neglectful and less engaged approach to maritime affairs.

This shift in policy and management during the Qing dynasty also extended beyond the charts themselves. It is noticeable that the Qing court had exhibited a deeper understanding of maritime cartography and a heightened focus on safeguarding its maritime frontier. This multifaceted approach included not only the creation of more detailed sea charts but also the implementation of effective measures, ranging from maritime militarization to the institutionalization of customs management, in order to ensure the safety and success of seafaring ventures. Such increased awareness of coastal conditions, along with their refined navigational aids and governance tools, were essential in contributing to a more comprehensive and layered maritime policy that contrasted sharply with the relatively passive stance observed during the Ming period.[45]

In hindsight, Qing sea charts emerged from a distinct Chinese cartographic tradition and a unique Chinese maritime perspective. Nevertheless, this does not preclude the possibility of drawing comparisons between these charts and their Western European counterparts. Sea charts originating from the Qing empire and Western Europe present both intriguing similarities and differences, providing valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of maritime cartography during the early modern era. A significant commonality between Qing charts and those of Western Europe is the consistent utilization of a nearly vertical, 90-degree point-of-view when depicting islands and coastlines. This approach offered several advantages, making it a preferred choice for cartographers in both regions during the early modern era. First of all, the 90-degree point-of-view allowed for a comprehensive and detailed portrayal of coastal features. By looking down at the map from an overhead perspective, mariners could easily identify and distinguish various geographical elements, including islands, promontories, and channels, with exceptional clarity. This visual clarity was especially critical for safe navigation along intricate coastlines and archipelagos, as it provided seafarers with an accurate representation of their surroundings.

Secondly, this vertical viewpoint facilitated efficient route planning and navigation. Mariners could readily gauge distances, angles, and relative positions of islands and coastal landmarks. This, in turn, enhanced their ability to chart courses, estimate travel times, and make informed decisions while at sea. Furthermore, the 90-degree perspective was conducive to ease of interpretation. By aligning the map's orientation with the actual compass directions, it simplified the process of map reading and navigation. Mariners could intuitively correlate the map's layout with their compass bearings, further streamlining their understanding of the maritime environment. Overall, the adoption of a nearly vertical, 90-degree point-of-view in both Qing and Western European sea charts represented a shared recognition of its practical

advantages. It not only facilitated accurate representation and efficient navigation but also contributed to the safety and success of maritime activities in the early modern era.

There are also some other intriguing parallels that could be made if we juxtapose the *haitu* in discussion with two comparative examples: 'The Smaller Islands of the British Ocean' by Robert Morden in 1695 and 'Channel Islands, Alderney, Guernsey' by Sark Jersey and Thomas Kitchin in 1753. A notable commonality among these charts is their use of different pastel colours to represent distinct geographical elements. This shared colour-coded approach was instrumental for seafarers and had several critical implications for maritime cartography in both Chinese and Western contexts. By assigning unique colours to specific geographic features such as islands, coastlines, reefs, and navigational hazards, mapmakers facilitated rapid comprehension. Mariners could then easily identify and differentiate these elements to navigate with greater efficiency and safety. Meanwhile, colour coding enhanced the accessibility of information on sea charts. In an era where literacy levels among mariners varied, visual cues such as colours provided a universally understandable means of conveying critical details. This inclusiveness ensured that seafarers, regardless of their educational backgrounds, could utilize these charts for navigation. In other words, the use of colours emphasized the practicality and usability of these sea charts. It was not merely an aesthetic choice but a deliberate technique to enhance the functionality and accessibility of the maps.

Furthermore, these sea charts, whether originating from China or Western Europe, transcend mere practicality and emerge as exquisite pieces of art in their own right. They are adorned with intricate patterns and an array of subtle, harmonious colours, which serve as a testament to the deliberate craftsmanship and refined aesthetic sensibilities of their creators. These charts, with their rendered contours and visual allure, demonstrate that their makers held them in high regard as more than just navigational tools; they were, in fact, profound

expressions of cultural and artistic ingenuity during the early modern period, whether in the East or the West.

Despite these commonalities we have discussed thus far, there has long been a prevailing perception that Western sea charts are inherently more accurate and dependable than their counterparts from the non-European worlds. However, this perspective oversimplifies the intricate landscape of sea charting during the long eighteenth century. Western sea charts from this period are often regarded as more sophisticated and precise, but it is crucial to recognize that the standards for accuracy in charting the sea evolved over time and varied significantly across different geographical contexts. What constituted accuracy in Europe might not hold the same significance in China, Japan, or Southeast Asia. Therefore, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the meaning and nature of accuracy, it is more effective to consider them within the context of the respective conceptions and visions in relation to the maritime world. This approach facilitates a more nuanced understanding of the varied approaches to maritime cartography during this era.

We can gain a more profound understanding of the Qing perspective on island governance within a particular context of late imperial China through the next example, *Wenzhoufu Ruianxian haitu* (Figure 8). In line with the previous sea charts, this *haitu* showcases the meticulous naming and precise location of offshore islands, offering valuable insights into their geographical context. While the mapmaker does not adhere to Western precision standards, mariners would still have been able to locate the islands depicted on it. Moreover, what sets this chart apart from earlier examples is its inclusion of specific textual information on the right-hand side of the map. This textual guidance aids users in identifying the most efficient routes to reach the fortified islands along the coast, while the concise information serves as compelling evidence, underscoring the Qing intimate familiarity with the offshore conditions and highlighting their strategic and administrative prowess in managing

these coastal territories. This unique blend of cartography and textual guidance demonstrates how seafaring knowledge was cultivated within a distinct context, evolving on its own terms to cater for specific maritime needs and challenges.<Figure 8 near here>

Navigational details were considered sensitive information from an administrative point of view. As a matter of fact, sailors who intended to set sail in the sea, including the inner and outer oceans, were carefully regulated and managed in eighteenth- and early ninetieth-century China. They would require licences and permits to conduct various types of seafaring activities, such as the sea trade or fishing off the coast. For instance, the Qing court restricted fishermen to fishing only within a designated area close to shore, or the 'inner sea'. There were also regulations standardizing the length of the ships, the colour painted on the boats,[46] as well as the type of timber used in constructing these vessels. Ship owners had to apply for a permit from the respective authority in order to sail in inner waters, while the coastal officials would only issue passes for boats that met these measurement requirements.[47] These regulations, in essence, were fairly strict at the time. In principle, therefore, all information pertaining to the domestic sea water was regarded as highly sensitive, if not classified.

It is crucial to recognize that the compilation of most sea charts examined in this article had a primarily military purpose. Consequently, the categorization of offshore islands as belonging to either the inner or outer oceans hinged on the demarcation of patrol perimeters established by the respective naval units. This division of sea space was not arbitrary; rather, it was a strategic response to the multifaceted security challenges faced by the Qing state, many of which emanated from its own subjects, particularly along the coastal regions. Effectively addressing these security threats necessitated a well-thought-out deployment of war junks and troops to the affected areas. By delineating and classifying the sea space and the positioning of outlying islands according to an inner–outer logic, the Qing empire aimed to ensure stability in the face of internal pressures, consolidating imperial control over maritime territories and

mitigating potential security risks emanating from within its borders. In this context, the categorization of islands as part of the inner or outer sea took on a strategic importance, which reflects the Qing commitment to safeguarding its maritime interests and territorial integrity.[48]

A related matter to naval control and island management is also visible in this sea chart as we can see that offshore islands are identified as demarcated geographical features that are used to divide the sea space into various sectors. Each sector was assigned to be patrolled and policed by a particular county to ensure the sea space was properly monitored. Similarly, the *Zhenhai shuishi yingxuntu* (Figure 9) also revels the same feature. As a result, no fishermen, boatmen, or traders were allowed to embark to these islands and put ashore if they had not obtained proper permission from the central government. In brief, everything had to be closely regulated. In light of these two specific sea charts (Figures 8 and 9), offshore islands were not only strategically important in guarding against potential invaders in this context but they were also effective to the Qing court in designating the sea spaces within its governing perimeter according to its respective administrative agendas. Such a strategic paradigm was a significant step for coastal governance in late imperial China. The Qing state was the first governing body we know of to pay this degree of attention to those offshore, outlying islands collectively and also to seriously consider them part of the maritime frontier.<Figure 9 near here>

The Qing court not only made use of those offshore islands as the geographical boundary that divided its sea space but it also used them for strategic proactive purposes in that it fortified them against any kind of potential threats coming from the sea and developed them as outliers of dynastic and imperial power. As shown in the *Xiamen yutu* (Figure 10), islands situated off the coast of Xiamen were armed with garrisons, towers, naval bases, munitions, shipyards, and warships. The situation in Xiamen was actually rather exceptional because previous episodes of aggression from the Zheng's forces in Taiwan cast long shadows over the Qing's military planning along the Fujian coast. A recurrent fear of Qing strategists was that

another Zheng clan could set off from Taiwan and its surrounding islands. History advised preparation. The deployment of ordnance and soldiery on the islands off the coast of Xiamen were therefore regularly strengthened both in times of threat and during intervals of peace. These garrisons and fortifications had been, without doubt, established to serve the state as bastions and bases, carrying a strong implication for national security, while governors and captains maintained readiness in these fortified islands against the risk of attack as precautionary initiatives across the Taiwan Strait were imperative. Sensibly, the Qing court was responsible for constructing and maintaining these architectures, weaponry, manpower, and supplies, as well as its intelligence and training. All of this military hardware, in hindsight, suggests that offshore islands served as effective outposts to protect Fujian province and its periphery by force.<Figure 10 near here>

Apart from those man-made military infrastructures, some of these offshore islands also offered a kind of 'natural protection' that gave comfort to the military planners and soldiers stationed along the coast. For instance, Dadan Island, as shown on Figure 11, was protected not only by the fortress and towers that had been built there but also by its craggy rocks and sand, while its neighbouring islands similarly took advantage of their natural mottes and moats, which made it hardly accessible to intruders. Along a similar vein, the city of Xiangshan, as portrayed in this figure, was also protected by a chain of offshore islands that served as a natural buffer. Any intending intruders would face the hazard of tides and currents between these small, rocky islands, as well as the prospect of landing under the attack of arrows and other military tactics. All in all, a well-fortified island would usually depend upon the advantages of geography and investment in military infrastructure, manpower, and munitions. Judging from what we find in the *Xiamen yutu*, we can then imagine that there would have been soldiers, usually between ten and twenty, assigned on some of these offshore islands to perform the duties of the garrison. These selected islands, in a way, operated similar to fortresses floating

on the sea, not to mention that the insular terrain therein generally gave advantage to defenders.<Figure 11 near here>

In addition to their role as fortresses floating on the sea, some of these offshore islands also served as springboards for naval operations that involved tracking and suppressing pirates, who usually set up their bases on lesser islands, which were even more remote and difficult to access. This is no doubt one of the reasons the Qing court had been so keen to control those islands offshore. If properly monitored and maintained, the pirates could hardly find a suitable place to hide or gather there. It was, however, a challenging task for the Qing court to keep all of its islands off the coast under control due to their rugged geographical features. As noted by scholar-officials such as Cui Yingjie (1699–1780), 'The ports belonging to the two prefectures of Wuding and Qingzhou, once the exit leads to the sea, are considered part of the seaport. In the vicinity of the coast, there are many small islands, which are generally composed of rocky islets and are unsuitable for habitation.'[49] Addressing these geographical obstacles required substantial investments by the Qing court in patrolling and maintenance. There were also difficulties of access and the urgency of maintaining supplies that might have affected both defence and communication. In fact, these islands were at times vulnerable to various kinds of incursion, and all of them faced threats from pirates or corsairs. As David Cressy eloquently suggests, 'Island isolation allowed inhabitants a measure of security, but also exposed them to danger.'[50]

The military infrastructure made of wood, such as the watchtowers, shipyards, and even the warships themselves, were always subject to neglect, damage, and decay. Salt spray and humid weather made for an environment even more unfavourable, in which timber rotted and iron weapons rusted. Furthermore, during the latter part of the Qianlong era, the navy encountered difficulties in effectively fulfilling its duties, compounding the challenges faced by these military assets.[51] In the words of Wang Jintai in 1759, 'at the time when the spring

inspections were scheduled to go to Chongming Island for review, there were only five patrol boats available, while the rest of the warships were all sent to the factory for repairs, leaving no boats to operate'.[52] Fukangan (1753–96) and Heshen (1750–99) also voiced similar concerns in the 1770s and 1780s.[53] Apparently, there was a persistent issue of not having a sufficient number of capable warships to effectively defend against determined assaults. In contrast, historical records indicate that organized pirate groups, led by infamous leaders like Cheung Po Tsai (1783–1822) and Zheng Yi Sao (1775–1844), were considerably better equipped and armed than the soldiers stationed on the offshore islands.[54] Fortifications in the island chain were full of gaps that compromised coastal security, particularly starting from the late eighteenth century, and this left many places and seaways open for pirates to intrude.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned challenges as well as the gradual breakdown of using these offshore islands for defence after the 1800s, it is worth noting that the Qing court, throughout much of the eighteenth century, had a strategic defence tactic in mind in integrating those offshore islands into their naval perimeter. It is also clear that the Qing had been trying to actualize their plan whenever resources were available.[55] In this case, it is necessary to acknowledge this vision of governing the maritime frontier in the early modern period, especially if we were to compare the Qing and other seafaring powers in the West, who had long been regarded as key players benefiting from their island management in their respective maritime enterprises since the fifteenth century.[56]

We should also contextualize these historical processes of maritime engagement with offshore islands within the broader framework of Qing frontier expansion. Matthew Mosca argues that the Qing empire in the long eighteenth century shifted from a 'localized frontier policy' primarily concerned with border defence and stability to a more 'expansive foreign policy outlook' that sought to establish regional dominance and influence.[57] His analysis contributes substantially to our understanding of the Qing engagement with the wider world as

it highlights the complex interactions between domestic concerns, border regions, and external geopolitical dynamics that existed on the Indian subcontinent and in Central Asia.

Following up on Mosca's examination, I am keen to add that such a shift in the Qing's frontier policy approach was also perceptible in the maritime frontier. The Qing evolving approach to coastal management, as evidenced by the sophistication of their sea charts and their commitment to maritime governance, mirrors this broader geopolitical shift. While the coastal regions and offshore islands were integral to the Qing empire's economic vitality, their strategic importance extended beyond mere resource management. They became key points of control, contributing to the Qing assertion of regional dominance and influence, not just in East Asia but within the broader transregional context. By placing maritime and land-based frontier policies in tandem, we gain a more comprehensive understanding of the Qing transformative engagement with its frontiers, both on land and at sea, during the early modern period. This holistic perspective enhances our comprehension of the multifaceted dynamics characterizing China's late imperial history and its position within the global milieu.

Meanwhile, by the time most of the sea charts discussed in this article were compiled, the Qing empire underwent a remarkable expansion, effectively doubling in size through the annexation of Taiwan and the conquest of significant territories, including the Mongols, eastern Turkestan, and Tibet. Under the Qianlong regime, the Qing extended its influence into various regions, including Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Burma, and Nepal. Consequently, these *haitu* should be regarded as products of the peak of Qing expansionism, an imperial manoeuvre that some historians treat as an example of early modern imperialism.[58] This is an era during which the central government commissioned a variety of projects to depict and justify their control over an expanded imperial domain. These officially led projects were not only textual but also visual and illustrative. Among them were the aforementioned Kangxi Atlas, the *Comprehensive gazetteer of the Great Qing realm* (*Da Qing yitong zhi*), published in 1746,

and *The Qing imperial tribute illustrations* (*Huang Qing zhigong tu*), completed in 1769. These grand surveys and the compendium of geographical information about the Manchu empire were of utmost importance in promoting the image of a new and competent China that was considerably different from the Ming.[59] The sea charts produced in the long eighteenth century were borne out of a political environment where the feats accomplished by the Qing emperors were cherished and valued, even though the scale of those *haitu* was much smaller than the above impressive, nation-wide endeavours. In a nutshell, these maritime charts should be analysed in conjunction with these ambitious mapping projects of the eighteenth century, as they share a recognizable link with the state-driven imperialistic ventures of the era.

<H1>V

In 1789, the 54th year of the Qianlong reign, the emperor issued an imperial edict ordering his navy to destroy the houses that had been built on the more than 2,000 islands scattered off his empire's coast and to forcibly remove the inhabitants and resettle them inland.[60] Although this clearance policy was smaller in scale and less well known than the embargo policies the early Qing had imposed to isolate the Zheng family's power in Taiwan, the Qianlong's approach is also worthy of our attention.[61] These two regimes' enforcements fundamentally shared a set of similarities: both suggested that an isolationist tactic would be effective enough to encounter problems as they arose in the maritime world. Needless to say, whether this strategy had achieved any substantial effect is another matter. In retrospect, we want to know what motivated the Qianlong emperor to enact a mini-model of the (in)famous sea ban policy. What went wrong in 1789? And what happened after this evacuation mandate was placed? Both of these questions are intricately connected to the broader context of island management that were previously outlined.

Although it was often celebrated as an era of prosperity, as discussed in the previous section, the Qing empire under the Qianlong regime, in actuality, was not always celebratory and prosperous. In 1789, for instance, the Qing government was snowed under with various urgent matters and turbulences across the country. That year, an internal rebellion in Vietnam dragged on, as did the Sino-Gorkha War in Tibet. Similarly, the maritime front of the empire to the east was not calm and peaceful either. 1789 was the year after the Lin Shuangwen Rebellion (1787–8) in Taiwan was pacified. Although this uprising did not last long, as the Qing navy took slightly over a year to stamp out the rebellion and the leader of the rebellion, Lin Shuangwen, was executed, most of Lin's followers dispersed to mainland China or went into hiding.[62]

In a memorial submitted by Heshen, one of the most (in)famous officials in the Qianlong court at the time, it was very likely that Lin's followers hid in the offshore islands; the report also pointed to a potential immediate risk if any one of them collaborated with the pirates or the existing population on those small islands. According to Heshen, the best way to 'maintain peace' was to destroy all of the houses on these islands and to forcefully move all the inhabitants to the mainland, particularly those living off the coast of Zhejiang, Fujian, and Guangdong. And along with this came the proposal to retrieve a mini-version of the coastal evacuation policy.[63] The aging Qianlong emperor had been so convinced by such an idea that he immediately approved this proposal for the sake of eradicating Lin's legacy. In a way, he was also taking advantage of the insularity of the offshore and the ability to isolate any potential enemies that might pose danger to his empire by stirring up trouble during troublesome times.

The story did not end here. And it is quite extraordinary to find that, at the end of the day, not every house was destroyed, nor every inhabitant had been forced to move, due to some of the more pragmatic officials, such as Fukangan and Gioroi Ulana (1739–95), who did not see Heshen's proposal as appropriate and practical in sorting out the problem. On the contrary,

this proposal was thought to bring devastating effects on those island communities. In the memorial Fukangan submitted to the Qianlong emperor on 15 November 1789, the officer had this to say,

<extract>

> Over time, communities have developed here, ranging from a few hundred households to tens of thousands. While it is necessary to punish those who violate the ban on private ownership, forcibly expelling everyone and destroying their homes would leave many without a means of livelihood. Moreover, not all of these residents are registered in our province, so returning them to their original places raises questions about resettlement. Allowing them to drift without support would undoubtedly lead to unrest. Therefore, I propose that we instruct the responsible officials to conduct thorough assessments of the islands near the province. This should include determining the population and living conditions in each area, identifying places with larger or smaller populations, and devising a plan for their orderly management. We should also consider the establishment of local militias, the deployment of military and civilian personnel, as well as the implementation of an inspection system. It is crucial that officials visit these areas in person and conduct individual investigations, confirming the residents' places of origin and addresses one by one.[64]

<\extract>

In a similar vein, Ulana petitioned that most families living on offshore islands should be exempted from the clearance policy simply because they were very disciplined individuals whose families dated back generations. He noted there were better ways to prevent them from making trouble or assisting or collaborating with pirates and Lin's admirers. For instance, he

suggested the Qing court should police these regions more frequently, carry out the *baojia* policy more effectively, and conduct another thorough survey across those offshore islands.[65]

After going through the memorials presented by Fukangan and Ulana, the Qianlong emperor realized that the earlier edict had been too harsh and rigid and that there should be flexibility when promulgating the rules.[66] He then agreed with Ulana that families that had being living on these offshore islands for a long time could remain there and only the houses on some other more strategic islands had to be immediately destroyed by the navy. In the same year, a comprehensive record of offshore islands was also compiled, clearly listing the number off the coast of Fujian and Zhejiang that could be exempted from the ban and the number of islands that had to be cleared out.

Taking the case of Fujian as an example,

<extract>

> there were 457 offshore islands in Fujian seawater. Among these islands, 247 of them were banned from further settlement (meaning that the families that were already there could remain on the island), 21 of them were found dangerous, in which the houses therein had to be destroyed, while forced displacement would be actioned.

<extract>

The situation in Zhejiang was quite similar, where '406 out of 561 offshore islands were banned from further settlement, while houses on 11 islands were destroyed'. According to the report, future migration was only permitted for 117 islands. In this case, official dealings with island populations had been clearly shaped by strategic, political, and defence considerations. Meanwhile, this document also specifically mentioned that, when the clearance policy took place, fishermen were nevertheless allowed to build temporary huts or shelters for fishing activities on 27 offshore islands.[67]

On reflection, what occurred between 1789 and 1790 does reinforce my argument that the Qing empire did not overlook its offshore islands in their maritime governance. The inter-relations between these islands and the central regime in Beijing had not necessarily been loose or weak. The need for national security and coastal stability also had to reckon with the particularities of these offshore territories. It is, however, hardly the case that the Qing empire belonged to a tradition that could be attributed to the topographical features and robust distinction of its islands offshore, but I would maintain that the strategic positions of some of those small islands gave them value and importance that outweighed their size. The Qing court treated these places scattered on the sea as manageable assets, as commercial nodes, as troublesome outliers, and above all, as an inseparable segment of its inner sea. The relationship between the Qing and its offshore islands thereby reflected the empire's considerations of security, distance, and remoteness of location. The identity of these islands was tied into a layered maritime network of stability, commerce, and communication. Dependent to varying degrees on the mainland, these islands were part of the grand picture that shaped the maritime consciousness of the Qing regime in the early modern era.

<H1>VI

In his *A full relation of two journeys: the one into the main-land of France, the other into some of the adjacent islands performed and digested into six books* published in 1656, the British traveller Peter Heylyn (1599–1662) had this to say about the islands he visited, 'Readers might wonder how I could say so much on so small a subject, if the great alterations which have happened there…had not occasioned these enlargements.'[68] My reactions as a maritime historian are somehow similar. Although the islands off the coast of the Qing empire are

comparatively diminutive and less strategic than those frontier cities or regions in inner Asia or its northern borderland, they should not be regarded as an obscure, remote corner that warrants little scholarly attention. The decades of engagement between the Qing court and its scattered offshore 'periphery' illustrates a history of asserted authority and considerable interdependence. Statesmen recognized the variety, vitality, and function of those islands, even if they might not have had the experience that would have permitted them to fully comprehend the islanders' attachment to the Qing empire. From Beijing's perspective, all in all, these islands could appear as having been buffers as much as assets, resources as well as responsibilities, costs as much as benefits.

As a matter of fact, a significant paradigm shift in the examination of China's engagement with its maritime world has taken place over the past decade. The conventional image of the Qing dynasty in the long eighteenth century as merely land-orientated has now become obsolete. Historians are no longer satisfied with such a stereotype and have put aside the conception that the Qing only realized the importance of strategic marine governance after the end of the First Opium War.[69] In view of this historiographical turn, in this article I seek to deepen our understanding of the Great Qing in relation to the sea. By focusing on a series of sea charts produced in the eighteenth century, alongside some relevant official papers, I have revealed that most of the islands off China's coast were intricately connected with the mainland through commerce, politics, navigation, sea patrolling, military provisions, and the challenge of piracy. These multifaceted interactions and the concerted efforts to incorporate these offshore islands into an administrative framework contributed to the formation of an early modern empire with a profound maritime dimension. Similar to certain sea charts produced in Western Europe that also included outlying islands, the *haitu* discussed in this article depict the domestic sea space in a deliberate and careful manner. They serve as instruments for projecting power and sovereignty, effectively visualizing the integration of the coast and those

seemingly irrelevant islands. After all, these territories harbour a certain degree of significance, distinctive in their characteristics as part of Qing history, and not the least for their having been frontier, offshore, and maritime.

<H1>Appendix

Name	**Production years**	**Fig. no.**
Shandong, Zhili, Shengjing Haijiang tu 山東直隸盛京海疆圖	c. 1634–52	1
Changshi shuishiying neiwaiyang yu tu 昌石水師營內外洋輿圖	1730	2
Xiangshan cheng shou yingxuntu 象山城守營汛圖	1730	4
Wenzhouzhen biaozhongying haixun yutu 溫州鎮標中營海汛輿圖	1731	5
Wenzhou fu Ruian xian haitu 溫州府瑞安縣海圖	c. 1731	8
Pingyang Ying yan hai jie zhi tu 平陽營沿海界址圖	c. 1739	3
Yuhuan zuoyou liangying xunyutu 玉環左右兩營汛輿圖	1807	7
Xiamen yutu 廈門輿圖	1825	10
Ningbo fu liuyi ji haidao yangtu 寧波府六邑及海島洋圖	c. 1830s	6
Zhenhai shuishi yingxuntu 鎮海水師營汛圖	1841	9

<back matter head>Acknowledgements.<\back matter head> I delivered versions of this article at SOAS, the University of Oxford, the University of Hong Kong, Academia Sinica, and NYU Shanghai. I am grateful to all who attended the talks for their thoughtful comments.

Special thanks go to Lars Laamann, Andrea Janku, Shabnum Tejani, Henrietta Harrison, Rana Mitter, Jennifer Altehenger, Loretta Kim, Angela Leung, Elizabeth Sinn, Cheng-heng Lu, Joanna Waley-Cohen, and Tansen Sen. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the two anonymous reviewers and Rachel Leow, the editor of *The Historical Journal*, for their insightful and constructive feedback that significantly shaped the revision of this article.

<captions>

Figure 1. *Shandong, Zhili, Shengjing Haijiang tu* 山東直隸盛京海疆 (c. 1634-1652).

Source: Library of Congress. LC classification no.: G7822.C6R4 1652. S4 Vault Shelf.

Figure 2. *Changshi shuishiying neiwaiyang yu tu* 昌石水師營內外洋輿圖 (1730). Source: British Library. Manuscript no.: Add. MS. 16359 (I)

Figure 3. *Pingyang Ying yanhai jiezhitu* 平陽營沿海界址圖 (c. 1739). Source: British

Library. Manuscript no.: Add. MS. 16358 (G)

Figure 4. *Xiangshancheng shou yingxuntu* 象山城守營汛圖 (1730). Source: British Library.

Manuscript no.: Maps 188.kk.1 (13).

Figure 5. Wenzhouzhen biaozhongying haixun yutu 溫州鎮標中營海汛輿圖 (1731).

Source: British Library. Manuscript no.: Add. MS. 16361 (I).

Figure 6. *Ningbo fu liuyi ji haidao yangtu* 寧波府六邑及海島洋圖 (c. 1830). Source: British

Library. Manuscript no.: Maps 188.kk.1 (4).

Figure 7. *Yuhuan zuoyou liangying xunyutu* 玉環左右兩營汛輿圖 (1807). Source: British

Library. Manuscript no.: Add. MS. 16359 (F).

Figure 8. *Wenzhoufu Ruianxian haitu* 溫州府瑞安縣海圖 (c. 1731). Source: British Library.

Manuscript no.: Or. 13159 (1).

Figure 9. *Zhenhai shuishi yingxuntu* 鎮海水師營汛圖 (1841). Source: British Library.

Manuscript no.: Add. MS. 16358 (I).

Figure 10. *Xiamen yutu* 廈門輿圖 (1825). Source: Add. MS. 17722.

<\captions>

---

[1] Zhonghua renmin gongheguo ziran ziyuanbu, ed., *Haidao tongji diaocha gongbao* (Beijing, 2018), p. 2.

[2] Quanguo haidao ziyuan zonghe kaifa shiyan baogao bianxie zu, ed., *Quanguo haidao ziyuan zonghe kaifa shiyan baogao* (Beijing, 1996), p. 15; Yang Wenhe, *Zhongguo haidao* (Beijing, 2000), pp. 220–1.

[3] James D. Johnston, *China and Japan: being a narrative of the cruise of the U.S. steam-frigate Powhatan, in the years 1857, 58, 59, and 60* (Philadelphia, PA, 1861), p. 218.

[4] Ibid.

[5] George Leonard Staunton, *An historical account of the embassy to the emperor of China* (London, 1797), p. 129; William Winterbotham, *An historical, geographical, and philosophical view of the Chinese empire* (London, 1795), p. 107; Clement Cruttwell, *The new universal gazetteer* (London, 1798), p. 3-P1.

[6] While a substantial tome titled *Zhongguo haidao zhi* (*Gazetteer of islands in China*) was published in 2013, it primarily serves as a descriptive reference, providing extensive information on the climate, geography, and demographics of China's offshore islands. See Zhongguo haidao zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, ed., *Zhongguo haidao zhi* (Beijing, 2013).

[7] See, for instance, Bruce A. Elleman, *Taiwan's offshore islands: pathway or barrier?* (Newport, RI, 2019); Micah S. Muscolino, *Fishing wars and environmental change in late imperial and modern China* (Cambridge, MA, 2009), p. 20; Jane Kate Leonard, 'The Qing strategic highway on the northeast coast', in Angela Schottenhammer and Roderich Ptak, eds., *The perception of maritime space in traditional Chinese sources* (Wiesbaden, 2006), pp. 27–40; Unryu Suganuma, *Sovereign rights and territorial space in Sino-Japanese relations irredentism and the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands* (Honolulu, HI, 2001), pp. 96–7; Ng Chin-keong, 'Information and knowledge: Qing China's perceptions of the maritime world in the eighteenth century', in Angela Schottenhammer (ed.), *The East Asian maritime world, 1400–1800: its fabrics of power and dynamics of exchanges* (Wiesbaden, 2007), p. 91.

[8] Michael Loewe, *Faith, myth, and reason in Han China* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 28–9, 116. Richard E. Strassberg, ed., *A Chinese bestiary: strange creatures from the guideways through mountains and seas* (Berkeley, CA, 2018), pp. 182, 185, and 205.

[9] For instance, the two imagined islands in the sea, Penglan and Fangzhang, were considered holy sites in Daoist mythology. See Peipei Qiu, *Basho and the Dao: the Zhuangzi and the transformation of haikai* (Honolulu, HI, 2005), p. 87; Livia Kohn, ed., *Daoism handbook* (Leiden, 2000), p. 794.

[10] Tonio Andrade, 'The Zheng state and the fall of Dutch Formosa, 1662', in Stephan Haggard and David C. Kang, eds., *East Asia in the world: twelve events that shaped the modern international order* (Cambridge, 2020), p. 162; Evan N. Dawley, *Becoming Taiwanese: ethnogenesis in a colonial city, 1880s–1950s* (Leiden, 2020), p. 35.

[11] Emma Teng, *Taiwan's imagined geography: Chinese colonial travel writing and pictures, 1683–1895* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), p. 81.

[12] John E. Wills, 'Relations with maritime Europeans', in Frederick W. Mote and Denis Twitchett, eds., *The Cambridge history of China*, VIII, Part 2: *The Ming dynasty, 1368–1644* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 333–75.

[13] David Chan-oong Kang, *East Asia before the west: five centuries of trade and tribute* (New York, NY, 2010), p. 119.

[14] Song Chun, 'Zoubao zunzhi yanjin liumin zai haidao gaiwu juzhu', a memorial submitted to the Qianlong emperor on 14 Dec. 1789 (archive preserved in The National Palace Museum (NPM), document number: 085062).

[15] Grant McCall, 'Nissology: a proposal for consideration', *Journal of the Pacific Society*, 17 (1994), p. 103.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Kong Anguo, *Shangshu zhengyi* (Beijing, 1999), p. 137.

[18] Fang Kongzhao, *Quanbian lüe ji*, collected in *Sibu jinhui congkan* (Beijing, 2000), XI, p. 311.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Wei Huan, *Jiubian tongkao*, collected in *Sikuquanshu cunmu congshu* (Jinan, 1996), CCVXXVI, p. 40.

[21] Gan Gang et al., *Penglai xianzhi* (Kangxi 12 nian keben), *juan* 2, 'fuyi', 4a–5a; Yan Youxi et al., *Laizhou fuzhi* (Qianlong 5 nian keben), *juan* 3, 'dingfu', 16a.

[22] *Qinding DaQing huidian shili: Jiaqing chao* (Taipei, 1992), *juan* 629, 'Bingbu: lüying chufenli haijin 1', p. 1149.

[23] Shi Lang, *Jinghai jishi* (Taiwan wenxian shiliao congkan, no. 6), 'Rangde chupi shu', p. 67.

[24] Zhuang Dahong, ed., *Yangjiang xianzhi* (Guangzhou, 2009), *juan* 8, 'zashi zhishiji', p. 443.

[25] Zhang Dianzhu, ed., *Xinning xianshi* (Kangxi 25 nian keben), 198a.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Li Huanzuan, *Qingqi xianlei zhixuanbian* (Taiwan wenxian shiliao congkan, no. 9), *juan* 7, p. 652; Yan Ruyi, *Yangfang jiyao* (Taipei, 1995), p. 1.

[28] Yue Jin et al., *Shandong Tongzhi*, in *Wenyuange sikuquanshu* (Taipei, 2005), CXXXI, *juan* 20, p. 443.

[29] Tian Wenjing, 'Zouchen fanghu shamen dengdao shiyizhe', a memorial submitted to the Yongzheng emperor on 16 Feb. 1732 (archive preserved in NPM, document number: 402006802).

[30] Kaerjishan, 'Chajin yanhai daoyu hushi zhaoken ji chaolu shigo ji shenshi xingming danyou', a memorial submitted to the Qianlong emperor on 11 Aug. 1747 (archive preserved in NPM, document number: 001164).

[31] Chen Dashou, 'Zoubao Shanghang diaomin yuejing chaiwu bing yanhai shisi dao zheng zhan qingxing you', a memorial submitted to the Qianlong emperor on 13 June 1747 (archive preserved in NPM, document number: 000896).

[32] Epeli Hau'ofa, 'Our sea of islands', *The Contemporary Pacific*, 6 (1994), pp. 152–3.

[33] John Connell and Robert Aldrich, 'Europe's overseas territories: vestiges of colonialism or windows on the world?', in Helen M. Hintjens and Malyn D. D. Newitt, eds., *The political economy of small tropical islands* (Exeter, 1992), p. 37.

[34] R. G. Ward, 'South Pacific island futures: paradise, prosperity or pauperism', *The Contemporary Pacific*, 5 (1993), p. 10.

[35] Yan Ruyi, *Yangfang jiyao* (Daoguang wushu zhongxia yue version), *juan* 1, 2a, 3b.

[36] *Daqing huidian: Yongzheng chao*, *juan* 139, 'Bingbu zhifangsi: haijin', p. 2213.

[37] Steven B. Miles, *Chinese diasporas: a social history of global migration* (Cambridge, 2020), pp. 52–3. Li Guotong, *Migrating Fujianese: ethnic, family, and gender identities in an early modern maritime world* (Leiden, 2016), pp. 177–97.

[38] *Xiangshan xianzhi* (Daoguang ba nian keben; Guangzhou: Lingnan meishu chubanshe, 2007), *juan* 2, 'jianzhi', p. 315.

[39] Yang Yongbin, 'Guangdong xunfu Jiebao zhuoding xunjian dengci fenbie shengxu', collected in Zhang Weiren, ed., *Ming Qing Dangan* (Taipei, 1986–1995), document number: A 61-67 (26-16), B35038.

[40] *Xiangshan* xianzhi, *juan* 2, 'jianzhi', p. 315.

[41] James A. Millward, '"Coming onto the map": "Western regions" geography and cartographic nomenclature in the making of Chinese empire in Xinjiang', *Late Imperial China*, 20 (1999), pp. 61–98.

[42] My speculation, if I may say so, is that these charts were produced very much based on estimations by experienced captains or sailors on these ships, which is very similar to the charting methods used by Portuguese and Spanish pilots, known as *ponto de fantasia* (points of fantasy), an idea that expressed the uncertainty of the estimation process.

[43] Hyunhee Park, *Mapping the Chinese and Islamic worlds: cross-cultural exchange in pre-modern Asia* (Cambridge, 2012), 172; Gang Deng, *Maritime sector, institutions, and sea power of premodern China* (London, 1999), pp. 167–8.

[44] See Ronald C. Po, '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 (2016), pp. 93–136.

[45] See Ronald C. Po, *The blue frontier: maritime vision and power in the Qing empire* (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 10–12.

[46] See Zhou Xianwen, ed., *Taiwan wenxian shiliao congkan* (Taipei, 1987), 7: 199, p. 617.

[47] For more about the history of those *chuanzhao*, see *Fujian yanhai hangwu dangan* (*Jiaqing chao*), in *Taiwan wenxian huikan* (Taipei, 1957-1972), vol. 5, no. 15.

[48] For a more in-depth exploration of the inner–outer model in the context of Qing maritime governance during the long eighteenth century, see Po, *The blue frontier*, pp. 44–88.

[49] Cui Yingjie, 'Zouwei chaming Shandongsheng haimian qingxing bing wu weige zhizhao rendeng hunxing chukou yu shandao dachang juzhu shi', a memorial submitted to the Qianlong emperor on 26 Mar. 1767 (archive preserved in the First Historical Archives of China (FHA), document number: 04-01-01-0270-062); see also Lü Mingfu, 'Zoucheng Shandong Deng Lai erfu dong bei nan sanxun daoyu qingce', a memorial submitted to the Qianlong emperor in 1764 (archive preserved in FHA; document number: 03-0364-075).

[50] David Cressy, *England's islands in a sea of troubles* (Oxford, 2020), p. 130.

[51] See Wang Hongbin, *Qingdai qianqi haifang: Sixiang yu zhidu* (Beijing, 2002).

[52] *Qing Gaozong shilu* (Beijing, 1986), *juan* 586, 'Qianlong ershisi nian wuyue jiashen' *tiao*, p. 501.

[53] Fukangan, 'Zou wei chagai waihai neihe chuanzhi ji qingcha haidao zhanzhu jumin qing zhanxian banli shi', a memorial submitted to the Qianlong emperor on 5 Nov. 1789 (archive preserved in FHA; document number: 04-01-30-0495-007).

[54] Robert J. Antony, *The golden age of piracy in China, 1520–1810: a short history with documents* (London, 2022), p. 40.

[55] Kong Yuxun, 'Zoufu kancha Guangdong waiyang daoyu guanxia shi', a memorial submitted to the Yongzheng emperor on 28 May 1726 (archive preserved in NPM, document number: 402013594); Yue Jun, 'Zoubao Miaodao wei haijiang zhongzhen qingshe zhuanyuan guanli zhe', a memorial submitted to the Yongzheng emperor on 21 Dec. 1731 (archive preserved in NPM, document number: 402012436).

[56] Merry E. Wiesner, *Early modern Europe, 1450–1789* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 505–8.

[57] Matthew Mosca, *From frontier policy to foreign policy: the question of India and the transformation of geopolitics in Qing China* (Stanford, CA, 2013).

[58] Laura Hostetler, *Qing colonial enterprise: ethnography and cartography in early modern China* (Chicago, IL, 2005), p. 26.

[59] Richard J. Smith, *Mapping China and managing the world culture, cartography and cosmology in late imperial times* (London, 2013), p. 76.

[60] Jiaoluochanglin, 'Zouwei zunzhi yuzou ge haidao hukou shumu you junjichudang zhejian', a memorial submitted to the Qianlong emperor on 10 Dec. 1789 (archive preserved in NPM, document number: 042938).

[61] For details pertaining to the embargo policies in early Qing, see Xing Hang, *Conflict and commerce in maritime East Asia: the Zheng family and the shaping of the modern world, c. 1620–1720* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 146–77; Zheng Yangwen, *China on the sea: how the maritime world shaped modern China* (Leiden, 2011), pp. 62–5; Philip A. Kuhn, *Chinese among others: emigration in modern times* (Lanham, MD, 2008), p. 21; Hayashida Yoshio, *Teishi Taiwan shi* (Tokyo, 2003), pp. 159–217.

[62] Wensheng Wang, *White Lotus rebels and South China pirates* (Cambridge, MA, 2014), pp. 18–19.

[63] Heshen's memorial was summarized in Song Chun, 'Zoubao zunzhi yanjin liumin zai haidao gaiwu juzhu'; see also Jiaoluochanglin, 'Zouwei chaming haikou daoyu zhuoshou shuishi zhanchuan yi li chachan yibian xunfang shi', a memorial submitted to the Qianlong emperor on 21 Sept. 1789 (archive preserved in NPM, document number: 403058301).

[64] Fukangan, 'Zouwei chagai waihai neihe chuanzhi ji qingcha haidao zhanzhu jumin qingzhanxian banlishi', a memorial submitted to the Qianlong emperor on 15 Nov. 1789 (archive preserved in FHA, document number: 04-01-30-0495-007).

[65] Gioroi Ulana, 'Zoubao chaming Min Zhe ersheng haidao liaofang minhu fenbie chaihui quzhu biancha', a memorial submitted to the Qianlong emperor on 2 Sept. 1790 (archive preserved in NPM, document number: 045510).

[66] Ibid. See the comments left by the Qianlong emperor in this memorial.

[67] 'Fujian Zhejiang ersheng gonggai haidao shu qingdan' (a report preserved in NPM, document number: 045559).

[68] Peter Heylyn, *A full relation of two journeys: the one into the main-land of France, the other into some of the adjacent islands* (London, 1656), p. 280.

[69] See, for instance, Po, *The blue frontier*; Ng Chin-keong, 'Information and knowledge: Qing China's perceptions of the maritime world in the eighteenth century', R. Kent Guy, *Qing governors and their provinces: the evolution of territorial administration in China, 1644–1796* (Seattle, WA, 2010), pp. 87–98; William A. Callahan, *Contingent states: Greater China and transnational relations* (Minneapolis, MN, 2004), p. 93; Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in world history: power and the politics of difference* (Princeton, NJ, 2021), p. 294.