

# *A Study on the Compilation of the Jiangxi Provincial Atlas for the Guangxu-Era Huidian Atlas*

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**Abstract:** While the Complete Atlas of Jiangxi Province from the Tongzhi reign is well-documented, the subsequent cartographic project undertaken during the Guangxu reign remains largely overlooked. This paper utilizes archival documents, memorials, and official reports to reconstruct the process of compiling the Jiangxi provincial atlas as part of the imperial Huidian Atlas (Atlas of the Collected Statutes) project. It details the establishment of a provincial surveying bureau in 1891, the challenges encountered—including non-compliant submissions from local prefectures, difficult terrain, and adverse weather conditions—and the measures taken, such as recruiting technical personnel and procuring Western surveying instruments. The study traces the multiple deadline extensions requested by provincial officials and documents the final completion and submission of the comprehensive atlas in 1896. Furthermore, it clarifies the history of the atlas's subsequent reprinting during the Xuanton era, resolving potential dating discrepancies in library catalogs. This paper argues for the significant historical value of the Guangxu-era atlas, particularly for the study of Jiangxi's local history, and highlights its importance as a primary source that awaits further scholarly attention.

## **1. Introduction**

During the Tongzhi reign, Zeng Guofan, the Viceroy of Liangjiang, and Liu Kunyi, the Governor of Jiangxi, organized the creation of the *Complete Atlas of Jiangxi Province*. This collection was mapped using the traditional Chinese "Jili Huafang" (mapping by grids of squares) method and included explanatory notes. It is currently the most widely recognized provincial atlas of Jiangxi from the late Qing dynasty. In fact, during the Guangxu reign, the Qing court ordered all provinces to compile the *Huidian Atlas*, and Jiangxi was included in this mandate. At present, the academic community knows very little about Jiangxi's performance and process in this surveying and mapping campaign. This article will provide a brief overview based on existing historical materials such as archives and official reports.

## **2. Establishment of the Surveying Bureau and Initial Challenges**

In the 17th year of the Guangxu reign (1891), Jiangxi Province established a surveying and mapping bureau under Provincial Administration Commissioner Fang Ruyi at the Office of the

Provincial Administration Commission to compile the "Complete Map of Jiangxi Province" for the "Atlas of the Qing Dynasty Collected Statutes." Initially, various counties and prefectures submitted maps, but upon review, these were found largely non-compliant with the regulations and formats prescribed by the Collected Statutes Museum. Critical details such as military camps, post stations, patrol points, marketplaces, tax checkpoints, ferries, mountain passes, garrison stations, embankments, and artillery forts were frequently omitted. Moreover, accurate surveying required precise astronomical measurements to depict terrain correctly, yet many submitted maps appeared speculative in their markings and lacked reliable data, with incomplete accompanying tables. Some maps were even directly copied from outdated gazetteer illustrations without employing the mandated grid-based measurement method, resulting in numerous errors. After careful consideration, Governor Dexin of Jiangxi attributed these issues to the specialized nature of cartography, which demanded expertise in both geography and mathematics—skills in short supply at the time. Simply returning the flawed maps for revision seemed futile and risked delays. Thus, he proposed two measures: First, counties unable to engage qualified surveyors independently were instructed to report to the provincial bureau, which would dispatch personnel to conduct surveys on their behalf, ensuring timely completion. Second, given Jiangxi's vast and varied terrain—from the mountainous southern Gannan region bordering Guangdong to the lake-dotted lowlands of Raozhou and Jiujiang (a key trading hub with expansive waterways)—Dexin petitioned the Collected Statutes Museum for a one-year extension to avoid hasty work and ensure meticulous mapping.<sup>[1]</sup>

"A memorial was submitted on the 26th day of the 8th lunar month, Guangxu 17; it is archived in the Grand Secretariat of Academia Sinica, Taiwan, China, as '26th day of the 9th lunar month, Guangxu 17' ". Shortly thereafter, The Shun Pao published an official notice:

The following is a proclamation by Fang, Provincial Administration Commissioner of Jiangxi with First-Grade Official Rank and Director of the Provincial Cartographic Bureau. It is hereby announced that the examination for candidates in surveying and cartography has been concluded under our supervision. Seven primary candidates and eight reserve candidates have been selected, each granted corresponding monetary rewards. Their respective local magistrates have been notified to await future assignments. Primary candidates will be deployed first; should their numbers prove insufficient, reserve candidates may be supplemented as needed. Awarded silver taels shall be collected in person at the Judicial Office the day after this proclamation's posting. Unselected candidates are dismissed from further consideration. The names of selected candidates and their rewards are listed below: Primary Candidates (7) – Each awarded 4 taels of silver: Hu Qicheng, Tan Yingdou, Li Zhonghua, Liu Guotai, Wu Xuanguang, Luo Qinming, Zhang Zhu. Reserve Candidates (8) – Each awarded 2 taels of silver: Zhu Guangbi, Zou Jue, Wang Renxu, Fu Lansheng, Guo Junyan, Cai Jun, Qi Tingchen, Qi Tinghuang.<sup>[2]</sup>

From this, it can be seen that after Dexin's request for an extension was approved, Fang Ruyi and his associates promptly initiated examinations to recruit technical personnel for cartographic surveying. Additionally, they dispatched agents to Shanghai and other cities to procure foreign surveying instruments, such as chronometers, theodolites, Kater's compasses, and quadrant altazimuths.<sup>[3]</sup>

### 3. The Difficult Surveying Process and Delays

In the winter of the 17th year (of Guangxu's reign), the Cartographic Bureau finally made "some preliminary progress." At that time, Provincial Administration Commissioner Fang Ruyi, who oversaw the project, and Deng Rongjing, the Grain Intendant and Circuit Intendant of Nanfu-Jian, decided to first conduct trial surveys of Jiangxi's provincial capital before proceeding to map Poyang Lake." Poyang Lake, where all waters converge, has long been known for its vast expanse.

In spring floods, it becomes a boundless stretch of water, while in winter droughts, its branching channels create a labyrinth of waterways. Surveying both land and water routes proved exceptionally challenging." Consequently, Jiangxi Province had to "dispatch additional officials, accompanied by surveyors and cartographers, to conduct detailed surveys in every county and village." Surveying required clear weather to properly set up instruments, establish baselines, and take measurements—rain made roads muddy and complicated the work. That winter, Jiangxi experienced relentless rain and snow, with freezing temperatures hindering surveys on both land and water. As a result, by the end of the 17th year, only the prefectures of Nanchang and Ruizhou had been fully mapped.

In the 18th year of the Guangxu reign (1892), weather conditions remained unfavorable. That year, "from spring through summer, rain prevailed over clear skies, flooding low-lying villages and obscuring elevation markers, rendering surveys nearly impossible." By the time floodwaters receded, significant time had already been lost. Compounding these challenges, Jiangxi's mountainous terrain further complicated the effort: "In elevated regions, towering peaks and undulating ridges meant surveying a single county—measuring mountain slopes, true landforms, and river widths/depths—could take over a month." Such difficulties had not been fully anticipated during initial planning. By the seventh lunar month, 67 counties across 12 prefectures remained unsurveyed. With no alternative, Governor Dexin once again petitioned for an extension—this time requesting two additional years to complete the task.

According to extant archives, Governor Dexin submitted two further petitions for deadline extensions within the year of Guangxu 19 (1893) alone.<sup>[4]</sup>

#### 4. Completion, Submission, and Final Report

Regarding the 20th and 21st years of Guangxu (1894-1895), historical records are scarce beyond fragmentary mentions in newspapers. It was not until the 22nd year of Guangxu (1896), when Jiangxi Province completed its cartographic survey, that related documentation became more substantial.

In the third month of that year (1896), Jiangxi Governor Deshou submitted several memorials regarding the *Collected Statutes* atlas project, including: "Memorial Reporting the Completion of Jiangxi Province's Cartographic Survey and Requesting Official Approval for Expenditure Reimbursement" (22nd day of the 3rd lunar month, Guangxu 22).<sup>[5]</sup>

In March of that year (1896), Jiangxi Governor Deshou submitted multiple memorials concerning the Atlas for the *Collected Statutes* project, including: "Memorial on the Completion of Jiangxi Province's Cartographic Survey and Request for Official Approval of Expenditures" (dated 22nd day, 3rd lunar month, Guangxu 22 [April 4, 1896]).<sup>[5]</sup>

In the third month of that year [1896], Jiangxi Governor Deshou submitted several memorials regarding the Atlas compilation for the *Collected Statutes*, including: "Memorial Reporting the Completion of Jiangxi's Provincial Survey and Requesting Official Authorization for Expenditure Reimbursement" (Dated: 22nd day of the 3rd lunar month, Guangxu 22 [April 4, 1896]).<sup>[5]</sup> In March of that year (1896), Jiangxi Governor Deshou submitted multiple memorials regarding the Imperial Atlas project, including: "Memorial Concerning the Completion of Jiangxi's Provincial Survey and Request for Official Budget Approval" (Dated: 22nd day of the 3rd lunar month, 22nd year of Guangxu reign [April 4, 1896]).<sup>[5]</sup> "Memorial Reporting the Completion of Jiangxi Province's Cartographic Survey, Requesting Official Approval for Expenditure Allocation and Recommending Awards for Meritorious Personnel" (22nd day of the 3rd lunar month, Guangxu 22 [April 4, 1896]).<sup>[6]</sup> "Memorial from the Governor of Jiangxi Regarding the Provincial Cartographic Survey" (23rd day of the 3rd lunar month, Guangxu 22 [March 23, 1896]).<sup>[7]</sup> "Memorial from the Governor

of Jiangxi Submitting the Complete Provincial Atlas" (29th day of the 3rd lunar month, Guangxu 22 [April 11, 1896]).<sup>[8]</sup> The first two memorials are preserved in the First Historical Archives of China, while the latter two are housed in the Grand Secretariat Archives at Academia Sinica, Taiwan, China. Xie Xiaohua's compiled work, *Governor Deshou of Jiangxi's Memorials Reporting the Completion of the Provincial Cartographic Survey*, likely combines the first three archival documents.<sup>[9]</sup>

From Xie's article, we can glean the following key details:

First, Governor Deshou outlined the general process and critical specifics of Jiangxi's cartographic survey. Second, he introduced the key personnel involved: "Assistant Prefect Chen Xizeng as supervisor, newly appointed Magistrate Sun Jiong as chief compiler, and selected Magistrate Yang Chengzeng among others as editors and proofreaders," recommending awards for diligent contributors. Third, he reported the survey's completion in the third month, with plans to dispatch officials to deliver the maps to the capital. The submission included: 1 provincial overview map; 13 prefectural maps; 1 directly-administered department map; 79 county/region maps (including 1 Poyang Lake map and 4 town maps); 15 volumes of textual descriptions (bound in 4 cases); 14 supplementary volumes on postal routes and distances (bound in 4 cases). Fourth, he detailed the expenditures: 36,725.89 taels of silver, drawn from provincial funds and strictly audited. Citing precedents from Hubei and Hunan, he requested official reimbursement from the "20% surtax" reserve. The Ministry of Revenue began reviewing this request in April-May 1896.<sup>[10]</sup> By May at the latest, Magistrate Zhu Zhaolin delivered Jiangxi's complete provincial atlas and supplementary postal route maps to the capital.<sup>[11]</sup>

## 5. The Xuantong Reprint and Catalog Discrepancies

The National Library of China currently holds a set of Jiangxi Provincial Atlas, attributed to Zhu Zhaolin as the responsible official—a logical connection given his role in delivering the maps. This atlas exists in two editions from different periods: the first from Guangxu 22 (1896) and the second from Xuantong 1 (1909). The second edition is particularly noteworthy. While the National Library catalogs it as "published in Xuantong 1 (1909) by the Jiangxi Official Paper Printing Office," earlier records indicate Zhu Zhaolin delivered the maps to the capital in Guangxu 22 (1896). Furthermore, in Guangxu 23 (1897), Zhu personally supervised the lithographic printing of the provincial atlas in Shanghai,<sup>[12]</sup> rather than being printed within the province.<sup>[13]</sup> To explain this phenomenon, it may be necessary to consider its connection with another development. During the New Policies period of the late Qing dynasty, the court established the Police Ministry, later reorganized as the Ministry of Civil Affairs, which became the supreme authority overseeing civil administration. Within this ministry, the Territorial Administration Department was specifically responsible for regional demarcation and cartographic work, including reviewing boundary maps, official/civil land records, etc. In Xuantong 2 (1910), to prepare for compiling new gazetteers, the Ministry further established the Institute of Maps and Gazetteers with detailed regulations to systematize the collection and organization of cartographic materials.<sup>[14]</sup> During this period, the Qing government extensively collected local gazetteers, maps, and other documents from various regions—including Jiangxi Province—to serve as references for New Policies planning. It was precisely within this context that during the Xuantong reign, Jiangxi reprinted and submitted to the capital the *Jiangxi Provincial Atlas* originally drafted in the Guangxu era. Consequently, when cataloging this atlas collection, the National Library staff naturally recorded its publication date as the Xuantong period, with the publishing institution likewise attributed to that timeframe.

## 6. Conclusion

Here we may digress to offer a concluding observation. While the Tongzhi-era *Jiangxi*

*Provincial Atlas* has garnered some academic attention, its Guangxu-era counterpart remains scarcely known—let alone studied—due to its prolonged sequestration in archival vaults. Yet extant records suggest the Guangxu atlas holds exceptional historical value, particularly regarding Governor Dexin and Fang Ruyi's meticulous surveys of Poyang Lake, making it indispensable for Jiangxi local history research. I remain confident that this Guangxu atlas will eventually resurface, at which point it will significantly advance current scholarship.

## References

- [1] Xie Xiaohua, "Provinces' Submission of Atlas Materials for the Collected Statutes during the Guangxu Reign," *Historical Archives*, no. 2 (2003).
- [2] *Beneficial Governance in Jiangxi*, *The Shun Pao*, November 5, 1891.
- [3] Zhang Hualong (ed.), *Jiangxi Provincial Chorography: Surveying and Mapping*, Fangzhi Press, 1995, p. 79.
- [4] *Memorial Requesting a Two-Year Extension for Jiangxi's Cartographic Survey*, 18th day of the 1st lunar month, Guangxu 19 (1893), *First Historical Archives of China*, File No. 03-7173-050.; *Jiangxi Governor's Dispatch Regarding Province-Wide Cartographic Survey*, 3rd day of the 3rd lunar month, Guangxu 19 (1893), *Grand Secretariat Archives of Academia Sinica*, Taiwan, File No. 137597.
- [5] *First Historical Archives of China*, File No. 03-7174-017
- [6] *Archived at the First Historical Archives of China*, File No. 04-01-38-0029-009
- [7] *Archived at the Grand Secretariat Archives, Academia Sinica, Taiwan*, Document No. 138567
- [8] *Archived at the Grand Secretariat Archives, Academia Sinica, Taiwan*, Document No. 137632
- [9] Xie Xiaohua, "Provinces' Submission of Atlas Materials for the Collected Statutes during the Guangxu Reign," *Historical Archives*, no. 2 (2003). Two months later, the *Peking Gazette* reprinted the full text of this article (*Peking Gazette Transcript*, *The Shun Pao*, July 3, 1896, lower edition).
- [10] *Ministry of Revenue Regarding Jiangxi's Survey Completion and Expenditures*, Guangxu 22/5 (1896), *Grand Secretariat Archives, Academia Sinica, Taiwan*, File No. 198653. Summary: The memorial was approved with the imperial endorsement ("Let the responsible office take note. Respect this.") on 4/9. The Ministry would verify the accounts upon receiving the maps.
- [11] *Jiangxi Official Gazette*, *The Shun Pao*, June 18, 1896, upper edition.
- [12] *Jiangxi Official Bulletin*, *The Shun Pao*, July 11, 1897, upper edition.
- [13] In *Xuantong 1* (1909), the *Jiangxi Official Book Bureau* was renamed *Jiangxi Official Gazette Bureau*, and later changed to *Jiangxi Official Paper Printing Office*. See: Jiang Jing (ed.), *Oriental Studies Journal*, Zhejiang Gongshang University Press, 2019, p. 299.
- [14] Zhao Zengyue, "Archival Records on the Establishment of the Institute of Maps and Gazetteers under the Late Qing Ministry of Civil Affairs (Part 1)," *Historical Archives*, no. 4 (2023).