This paper is a broad speculation on image-making from the late Eastern Zhou to the Han. The kinds of images I want to consider include pictorial motifs and compositions (which are conventional subjects of art history) as well as abstract signs and patterns (which usually escape art historians’ attention). My main thesis is that during this period, not one, but a number of systems developed side by side to supply different types of images. A single “subject matter” could thus be rendered in different visual presentations that operated as different languages and interacted in an increasingly complex visual culture.

Having laid down this basic claim, I want to focus on one such “subject matter”—the universe—defined as an all-inclusive entity, encompassing all things—heavens, earth, and all that is in them—as well as time and space. Based on this definition the universe means an absolute interiority, a closed system that has everything inside and nothing outside. It is easy to understand why this interiority was imagined in terms of architecture in various ancient cultures. Such imaginings, in turn, stimulated the interest in fashioning a building as a microcosmic architectural representation of the entire cosmic order.

Two kinds of microcosmic buildings were pursued through divergent cultural practices in China from the Eastern Zhou to Han. One of these was an idealized ritual structure known as Mingtang, translated into English as Bright Hall or the Hall of Light. Fig. 1 a–b shows the remaining foundation of the Bright Hall constructed by Wang Mang in 4 AD. The structure was highly geometric. The central building, the Bright Hall itself, had a ya-shaped floor plan, with three rooms on each side. Standing on a round platform, it was surrounded by alternating circles and squares, the shapes of Heaven and earth. Han texts praise the Bright Hall as “the greatest thing

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1 The editors would like to thank Wu Hung for kindly allowing us to include this transcribed version of the presentation that he gave at the panel on “Tu (diagrams, charts, drawings) in traditional Chinese culture”, Annual Meeting of the Association of Asian Studies, Chicago, 1998. The editors took the liberty to add cross-references to other contributions in this volume.
among all things,” which “manifests the deepest meaning of all mean-
ings.” This is not because the hall has an imposing monumentality (in
fact, Wang Mang’s building is said to have been completed in a mere
twenty days), but because the hall’s architecture demonstrates the
working of the Universe. The building itself thus becomes “the source
of changes and transformations.” As the second-century author Cai
Yong 蔡邕 wrote, “It brings all things into its unifying light, and this
is why it is called Bright Hall.”

The other kind of microcosmic architecture developed in a quite
different context. It resulted from changing mortuary practices and
especially from a new vision of the afterlife. Understandably, a grave
was by nature divided from the world outside and had interior only.
From the Eastern Zhou to the Han, when the afterlife began to mimic
life itself in people’s imagination, images of heaven, earth and men
were fabricated and installed in a tomb to transform it into a self-con-
tained microcosm of the universe. The earliest known example of
such a structure is probably the grave of the First Qin Emperor 秦始
皇帝. According to Sima Qian 司馬遷, it contained artificial rivers
and oceans, models of palaces and the hundred officials, and all sorts
of strange objects and valuables. Sima Qian summarizes the tomb’s
decoration in a single sentence: “Above were all the Heavens and
below all the Earth.” We have no way to verify his report: the burial
chamber at Lishan 驪山 has not been opened, and to my knowledge
no excavated tombs from the third and second centuries BC had cele-
tstial bodies painted on their ceilings. Such architectural murals have
only been found in tombs dating from the first century BC, actually
very close to Sima Qian’s own time (Col.Pl. III). These murals began
a powerful art movement, in which numerous images were invented
to transform a tomb, a mortuary shrine, or a sarcophagus into a vivid
pictorial universe. In this universe, Heaven is not an abstract circle,
but a concrete space filled with gods and spirits, emerging in clouds
whose changing shapes convey the sense of transformation (Fig. 2.1–
2.2). Other spaces in this universe include the immortal realm and the
human world, where one finds different sorts of figures and events
(Figs. 10–12).

The title of this paper thus intends to capture a main difference be-
tween these two systems of visual presentation: one system diagrams
the universe with abstract symbols and patterns; the other pictures the
universe with a predominantly descriptive language. That these two
systems developed in parallel for hundreds of years must imply some
profound reasons for this remarkable persistence. What are these reasons? What are the theoretical foundation and practical applications of each system? What is the relationship between them? It is perhaps still premature to give a systematic answer to these questions—many more factual details need to be investigated and many more theoretical problems need to be considered. My purpose here is to begin this research by focusing on a single aspect of the two kinds of representations of the universe, namely, their connections with different *tu*, a term used variably in ancient texts for diagrams, charts, illustrations, or pictures.

* * *

Let us begin with the Bright Hall. Numerous studies have been devoted to this structure in both traditional and modern scholarship.\(^2\) Without going into too much detail, I can propose that the symbolism of this hall as a microcosmic representation of the universe resulted from a historical process, during which an ancient structure of the same name was reinvented and given a new form and meaning. This ancient Bright Hall was a principal structure in the Western Zhou royal temple and a major site of state ceremonies. The “Mingtang wei” 明堂位 (Positions in the Bright Hall) chapter in the *Liji* 礼记 (Book of Rites) records one such ceremony, albeit in a highly idealized form. (Part of this text is also found in the “Mingtang” section in the *Yi Zhoushu* 逸周書.) As shown in a reconstruction of the ritual (Fig. 3), the assigned “position” (*wei* 位) of the king, as well as those of the courtiers, the feudal lords, and the barbarian chieftains, implies a courtyard building with a clearly defined central axis and south-facing orientation. This form resembles actual Shang-Zhou ritual buildings found in archaeological excavations (Fig. 4); but differs fundamentally from various forms of Bright Hall developed during the Eastern Zhou to Han, which all omit the north-south axis but emphasize the four directions and the center. Nevertheless, what these later Bright Halls derived from the old Bright Hall was not just a name. As its title signifies, the “Positions in the Bright Hall” chapter is about *wei*—position or two-dimensional spatiality. This text maps out a political system as architecture; the same technique is then used to fashion the Bright Hall as a microcosmic structure. (It should be

\(^2\) See footnote 63 in Dorofeeva-Lichtmann, this volume.
noted, however, that neither the political structure nor the architecture described in the “Positions in the Bright Hall” chapter is all-inclusive and self-sustaining. The building stands for the Central Kingdom only; barbarians or foreigners outside its walls belong to an open space.)

By the end of the Eastern Zhou, the old Bright Hall had become a historical memory. But its reputation of being a supreme embodiment of sovereignty and political order was only enhanced. In an interesting twist, this elusive building came to symbolize not only a lost past but also an approaching future. “To rebuild” the Bright Hall became synonymous with the founding of an ideal government for a unified country. Thus when Xunzi 荀子 finished presenting his political plan to a feudal lord, he concluded his speech by saying: “If things are done this way, then the Bright Hall can be constructed, and you can hold court there to receive the feudal lords.” Mencius 孟子 made a similar claim in his conversation with King Xuan 宣 of Qi 齊.

Neither Mencius nor Xunzi proposed an architectural plan for the new Bright Hall. One scholarly opinion attributes the emergence of such plans to philosophers in the School of Yin-yang and Five Phases. But as Li Ling has recently argued, this school had a broad base in various religious, shamanistic, military, technical, astronomical, and medical traditions and practices. Many of these traditions employed and developed tu 圖 diagrams, charts, and drawings. Enough evidence indicates that when Bright Hall was reinvented during the late Eastern Zhou, it derived forms and concepts from at least three kinds of tu, including the cosmograph shitu 式圖, architectural drawings, and a kind of non-linear text I call “tu-texts.”

Shitu has been discussed extensively by Li Ling, Don Harper, and other scholars.³ Shi 式 is an instrument used in divination, usually consisting of a round “heaven plate” and a square “earth plate”; both plates are engraved with various marks indicating astronomical and calendrical divisions (Fig. 5). As Li Ling has demonstrated, the patterns formed by these shapes and marks (which he calls shitu) are not only found on the shi divining board, but can be seen in the designs of chess boards (see Col.Pl. IV), mirrors, and certain texts dating from the late Eastern Zhou to Han.⁴ As a representation of the universe, a shitu necessarily consists of a number of geometric patterns, which are in turn composed of highly abstract visual elements such as lines.

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⁴ Li Ling 2000 [rev. of 1993]: 89–176. See also Kalinowski, this volume.
and shapes. Li Ling has defined five basic patterns in a *shitu*, including “four directions” (*sifang* 四方) “five positions” (*wuwei* 五位), “eight points” (*bawei* 八位), “nine palaces” (*jiugong* 九宮), and “twelve divisions” (*shier du* 十二度) (Fig. 6). We may add yet another: the circle and square or *tiandi* 天地. Each of these basic patterns has the potential to generate new patterns, and can be combined with other visual elements such as colors and zoomorphs.

The second type of *tu* that played an important role in visualizing and conceptualizing the new Bright Hall were architectural drawings, which demonstrated a set of conventions in representing buildings. Two such drawings have survived from the fifth and fourth centuries BC. One of them, a drawing inlaid on a bronze plate, details the plan for a royal mausoleum of the Zhongshan kingdom (Fig. 7). It shows a rectangular compound defined by double walls. Within the inner wall, five squares indicate the king’s tomb and those of his queens and concubines. Short inscriptions specify the measurement of each architectural feature. The other drawing is painted on the lid of a lacquer ware, found in a Qi tomb near Linzi (Fig. 8). Though damaged, it still shows an architectural complex conforming to an overall *ya*-shape, with three rooms on each side and surrounded by a ring of “water” patterns. The two drawings represent different buildings, but they employ similar techniques to render a three-dimensional structure as a two-dimensional plan. By reducing architectural features to nearly geometric shapes, these drawings most effectively define their *wei*—the positions and juxtapositions of these features within a definite spatial boundary. These two drawings are thus close to diagrams. The one from Linzi in particular shows strong affinities with a *shitu*. In fact, the striking similarities between this drawing and Wang Mang’s building has led Hwang Ming-Choring to identify it as a fifth-century BC design for the Bright Hall.

The third source for reinventing the Bright Hall is a kind of *tu*-text, which has been studied by Vera Dorofeeva-Lichtmann. But her subject is a larger group of materials which she calls “non-linear textual structures.” In my own definition, a *tu*-text must possess two basic features: first, it must be arranged into a non-linear spatial pattern and this pattern must accord with an established *tu*; and second, the same *tu*-pattern must be internalized as the text’s intrinsic textual structure.

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5 For the Zhongshan “Mausoleum Plan” or “Design of the Mausoleum District” (*Zhaoyu tu* 兆域圖), see also Behr, this volume.
7 Dorofeeva-Lichtmann 2005, also this volume.
Although some texts, including the inscriptions on the Zhongshan mausoleum design, are arranged in specific spatial configurations, I refer to them only as “spatial texts,” not tu-texts, because their spatial arrangement does not demonstrate an identifiable tu-pattern. Conversely, once a tu-text has been converted into a linear text and thus lost its original spatiality, its textual structure alone does not warrant its identity as a tu-text. To regain this identity, its spatial layout has to be reconstructed.

An Eastern Zhou tu-text in its original form is the famous Chu Silk Manuscript (see Fig. 12a–d in Dorofeeva-Lichtmann, this volume). A restored tu-text is the “Youguan tu” 幼官圖 or “Xuangong tu” 元宮圖 in the Guanzi 管子 (see Fig. 6 in Kalinowski, Fig. 9a in Dorofeeva-Lichtmann, this volume). Despite some obvious differences, these two works share two important features. In terms of layout, both works are arranged in a cardinally-oriented composition with a clearly defined center. In terms of content, both works have close relationship with the literary genre yueling 月令 or “monthly ordinances.” Generally speaking, yueling originated from a type of almanac that prescribes appropriate human activities according to seasons and months. Toward the end of Eastern Zhou, this form was adapted by some politically-minded intellectuals in an effort to design both a correlative cosmology and an ideal government. In their plans, the “monthly ordinances” not only give the astronomical and five phase correlations of each month, but also regulate the correct ritual and administrative behavior for the ruler. Such plans are found in a series of late Eastern Zhou to early Han texts, including Guan zi, Lüshi chunqiu 呂氏春秋, Liji, and Huainanzi 淮南子. In these texts yueling and Bright Hall are integrated, a point important to this paper. Through this integration, the textual structure of yueling was given an explicit architectonic form, and the Bright Hall finally gained a definite cosmological symbolism.

As these three kinds of tu—shitu, architectural drawing, and tu-text—all contributed to the reinvention of the Bright Hall, they also explain some major features of this building as envisioned in the late Eastern Zhou to Han. Simply stated, in this vision, (1) the basic elements of the Bright Hall are abstract signs and patterns; (2) these

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8 For the seminal studies of the Chu Silk Manuscript, see footnote 70 in Dorofeeva-Lichtmann, this volume.

9 Scholars have proposed different reconstructions; this figure shows the earliest proposal by Guo Moruo 郭沫若. For other reconstructions, see Fig. 9b–d in Dorofeeva-Lichtmann, this volume.
signs and patterns are arranged on a two-dimensional plane; and (3) this geometric imagery developed largely within a textual tradition and attracted attention mainly from philosophers, politicians and ritual specialists. This textual tradition continued to expand during the Han. An important development is the appearance of a series of texts entitled “The Yin-Yang Principles of the Bright Hall” (Mingtang yinyang 明堂陰陽), which began to contain architectural designs for the monument. (A fragment of “Mingtang yin-yang” survives in the Taiping yulan 太平御覽; a more detailed plan is given in the Da Dai liji 大戴禮記.) Although such designs became increasingly complex as they incorporated more and more intellectual and political agendas, the architectural complexity of the proposed Mingtang structures resulted from superimposing multiple tu-patterns and numerological systems onto a basic “five phase” pattern. This development culminated in Cai Yong’s “Treatise on the Bright Hall and Monthly Ordinances” (Mingtang yueling lun 明堂月令論), the most detailed account of the Bright Hall given by a Han author. The building is conceived as a collection of disembodied features, each indexing a particular cosmological component, value, or movement:

The various sections of the Bright Hall have their regulations. The whole building has a square floor plan of 144 chi on each side, a measurement determined by the numerical value assigned to Earth. The round roof is 216 chi in diameter, which is based on the numerical value assigned to Heaven. The Great Temple in the center is three zhang on each side, and the Room of Communing with Heaven is nine zhang in diameter, because nine and six represent the transformation of yin and yang. The building’s 8 openings imply the eight trigrams. The 9 chambers symbolize the nine provinces. The 12 rooms correspond to the 12 zodiac constellations. Each of the nine chambers has four doors and nine windows, so that there are altogether 36 doors and 72 windows. The Room of Communing with Heaven is 81 square chi, a measurement based on squaring the length of the Yellow Bell pitch pipe. 28 columns are arranged along the four sides of the building; each group of seven columns symbolizes the seven xiu. Each chamber is three zhang tall, a measurement based on the three realms of Heaven, earth, and Man. The building has four sides and is painted with five colors; four and five are the numbers of the four seasons and the Five Phases, which determine the activities taking place there. The structure covers an area of 24 zhang on each side, a figure that echoes the 24 divisions of the year. It is surrounded by water, which symbolizes the four seas.
This diagrammatic mode of representing the universe clearly differs from a pictorial rendering of the universe. The difference, however, is not just the type of sign being used. I have mentioned Sima Qian’s description of the First Emperor’s tomb chamber, which ends with the sentence “Above were all of the heavens and below all of the earth.” This statement introduces a standard formula in documenting funerary decoration. An inscription on a second-century mortuary shrine, for example, first surveys individual motifs that decorate the shrine’s interior and then summarizes the whole decorative program into two large sections “above” and “below”:

There are interlocking dragons and winding serpents; fierce tigers stretch forward their heads, gazing into the distance; black apes ascend heights; lions and bears roar, strewn everywhere like clouds. There are towers and pavilions of unequal heights; great processions of chariots set forth. Above are clouds and immortals; below, figures of filial piety, excellent virtue and benevolence.

What we find here is a standardized visual model, in which a micro-cosmic representation of the universe is confined in a three-dimensional space, constructed by large sections that pertain to the realms of heaven and earth. This representation thus differs radically from the Bright Hall, which manifests its meaning through abstract signs arranged on a two-dimensional plane. Existing funerary structures confirm this difference. Several tombs dating from the first century BC are painted with heavenly bodies on the ceiling while earthly landscapes and historical scenes decorate the lintels and walls (Col.Pl. III). This vertical structure of the universe is further combined with a horizontal dimension: in Eastern Han tombs and shrines, the gables became the legitimate space for portraying immortal paradise (Fig. 11). (This arrangement follows a convention that Wolfgang Bauer pointed out years ago, “it was the West and the East that were the classical compass points for paradise.”) An example that combines the three realms of Heaven, Earth, and immortality is Wu Liang’s memorial shrine built in 151 AD (Fig. 9a–b). As I have discussed elsewhere, Heaven manifests itself as concrete omens on its ceiling; the two gables are occupied by the Queen Mother of the West and the King Father of the East; and the three walls provide the space for

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10 Bauer 1971: 142. See also pp. 142–150. (Engl. translation 1976.)
depicting human history, from the creation of mankind to the time of recording (Fig. 9a,b).

In fact, Wu Liang’s shrine and Wang Mang’s Bright Hall offer two supreme examples for understanding the two Han systems for representing the universe. Wang Mang’s Bright Hall demonstrates an official cosmology; each feature of this building, based on a specific numerical value, is definite and unchangeable. The Wu Liang Shrine, on the other hand, is a personal interpretation of a basic cosmological structure; the content of heaven, earth, and the immortal world—the pictorial motifs on the ceiling, walls, and gables—are chosen to reflect a specific view. The structure of the Bright Hall, as I have proposed earlier, is based on a highly abstract *tu* and can actually be considered a *tu* in an architectural form. The structure of the Wu Liang Shrine is not determined by any *tu*; instead it derives its decorative motifs from multiple sources including some *tu* catalogues. I should remind the reader that *tu* is a very general category, including not only geometric diagrams such as *shitu*, but also more concrete images such as maps, astronomical drawings, omen catalogues, and even illustrations of historical figures and events. While the Bright Hall is firmly associated with abstract *tu* patterns, images in the Wu Liang Shrine and other funerary structures are often supplied by those “pictorial” *tu*. For example, images on its ceiling are selected from the *Ruitu* 瑞圖 or “Omen Catalogue” (Fig. 10). Those on the walls are chosen from illustrated texts called *tu zan* 圖贊, or “*tu*-pictures accompanied with eulogies,” that summarize and illustrate the biography of a filial son or an exemplary woman (Fig. 12b). Other funerary structures derive pictorial motifs from “Shanhaijing tu” 山海經 (Tu of the Canon of Mountains and Seas), “Xingtu” 星圖 (Star maps), “Chengtu” 城圖 (City maps), “Kongzi turen tufa” (Methods for drawing Confucius and his disciples), and others. Very seldom is an abstract *tu*-pattern used to decorate a tomb or shrine. In fact I only know one such example, a tomb near Luoyang 洛陽 in which a “five phases” pattern appears on the ceiling. Not coincidentally, this tomb was built during Wang Mang’s reign (Col.Pl. V).

Many things may be learned from a synthetic study of these two visual systems and their relationship. To conclude I want to propose a possible connection between these two systems and different traditions in Han historiography. As part of his cosmic design, Wang Mang’s History evolves in an abstract linear pattern: a circular five-phases movement “produces” all the dynasties, the last one being his
own Xin dynasty (Fig. 13). The “block construction” of the Wu Liang Shrine’s decoration, on the other hand, finds an excellent parallel in Sima Qian’s *Shiji* 史記. Its portrayals of ancient sovereigns (Fig. 12a) are a counterpart to the “Basic Annals” (“Benji” 本紀) in the *Shiji*; the subsequent depictions of famous historical figures (Fig. 12b) match the “Memoirs” (“Liezhuan” 列傳); and the last scene of the pictorial program, which represents an event in Wu Liang’s own life (Fig. 12c), echoes Sima Qian’s “Self-statement of the Grand Historian” (“Taishigong zi xu” 太史公自序) that ends the *Shiji*. In this history, historical patterns and principles are exemplified by people and events, and the past is recorded from a retrospective vintage point embodied by the historian himself.

**REFERENCES**


Fig. 1: (a) Floor plan of the ritual site of the Bright Hall and Biyong, late Western Han dynasty, AD 4. Excavated in 1956 at Chang’an, Shaanxi province. (b) Floor plan of the Bright Hall.
Fig. 2.1: Wu Family Shrine carving on a stone slab of the rear group showing celestial scenes. Upper half.
(a): Ink rubbing. Reproduced from Sekino Tei (1916), pl. 77.
(b): Redrawing from the original ink rubbing. Adapted from Feng Yunpeng and Feng Yunyuan (1821, Shisuo vol. 3, houshishi (後石室 5–6).

Fig. 2.2: Wu Family Shrine carving on a stone slab of the rear group showing celestial scenes. Lower half.
(a): Ink rubbing. Reproduced from Sekino Tei (1916), pl. 77.
(b): Redrawing from the original ink rubbing. Adapted from Feng Yunpeng and Feng Yunyuan (1821, Shisuo vol. 3, houshishi (後石室 5–6).
Fig. 3: Reconstruction of the ritual “positions” in the Bright Hall according to the “Mingtang wei” 明堂位.
Adapted from Hwang Ming-Chorng (1996: 699).
Fig. 4: An Early Western Zhou temple-palace structure. 11th–10th centuries BC. 45x32.5 m. Fengchu, Shaanxi province.
(a): Floor plan.
(b): Reconstruction.
Reproduced from Wu Hung (1995: 87)
Fig. 5: Cosmograph (shi 式, the jiugong 九宮 type).
Fig. 6: (a) “four directions” (sifang 四方), (b) “five positions” (wuwei 五位), (c) “eight points” (bawei 八位), (d) “nine palaces” (jiugong 九宮), (e) “twelve divisions” (shier du 十二度).
Reproduced from Li Ling (2000: 130–133).
Fig. 7: Drawing of the "Mausoleum Plan" or "Design of the Mausoleum District" (Zhaoyu tu). Bronze tablet with gold inlay, 94 x 48 cm. Zhongshan kingdom, late 4th century BC. After Wenwu (1979.1: 23), reproduced from Loewe and Shaughnessy (1999: 714).
Fig. 8: The lid of a lacquer ware found in a Qi tomb near Linzi (Langjiazhuang, Shandong), the Warring States period.
Reproduced from *Kaogu xuebao* (1977.1: 82).
Fig. 9a: Reconstruction of the Wu Liang Shrine (built in AD 151) by Wilma Fairbank (1941) showing the interior sides of the walls and the roof. Reproduced from Fairbank (1941: Fig. 2).

Fig. 9b: The Wu Liang Shrine carvings on the interior walls and roof. Drawing. Reproduced from Wu Hung (1995: 239).
Fig. 10: Omen images carved on the ceiling of the Wu Liang Shrine (built in AD 151).

(a) Qilin unicorn, (b) yellow dragon, (c) white tiger, (d) intertwining trees, (e) jade horse, (f) birds joined at the wing, (g) fish joined at the eye, (h) white horse with red mane, (i) red bear, (j) lake horse, (k) six-legged beast, (l) beasts joined at the shoulder, (m) silver jar, (n) black gui tablet, (o) jade sheng headdress, (p) glass bi disk. Reconstruction.

Fig. 11: The gables of the Wu Liang Shrine (built in AD 151). Ink rubbings and drawings.
(a,b) the paradise of the Queen Mother of the West on the west gable.
(c,d) the paradise of the King Father of the East on the east gable.
Reproduced from Wu Hung (1992: 110).
Fig. 12: The Wu Liang Shrine (built in AD 151) wall carvings. Ink rubbings.
(a) The five “ancient sovereigns” or legendary emperors.
(b left) Jing Ke’s attempted assassination of the King of Qin.
(b right) Yao Li’s assassination of Prince Qing Ji.
(c) A county official paying respect to a retired gentleman.
Fig. 13: Wang Mang’s pattern of dynastic transmission. Reproduced from Wu Hung (1995: 186).