

Garret Pagenstecher Olberding

Introduction

Having a “sense of place” is to understand oneself as belonging in, or at least occupying, a distinctive location. It is to be situated in an environment or locale – one is somewhere and that “somewhere” is not just anywhere. To have this sense is to be experientially grounded, to find experience framed or contoured to a landscape. But our “sense of place” is increasingly undermined by technological changes. Our technologies can simultaneously map with great precision where we presently are and have us communicating with or accessing the distant and faraway. These technologies “locate” and “place” us everywhere, and therefore nowhere. What does it mean to “find one’s bearings” in such a world, much less to achieve a “sense of place” that would insistently remark where one physically stands? In some important way, while technology can always pinpoint where we are, we have worse bearings precisely because of our technological framing. Technology maps a world, but because the world so mapped lacks the symbolic and signifying ways place has most often mattered, it is a world in which we cannot as easily locate our ground and thus perhaps ourselves. We can know where we are and yet be utterly lost.

This volume will provide a clearer view of the importance of place through a contrastive temporal lens. In the premodern Chinese circumstance – which, in the essays for this volume, encompasses the Zhou to the Song dynastic periods – a sense of place, of situatedness lay at the root of how space was parcelled, represented, moved through and manipulated. And yet this deeper, more rooted emplacement did not stifle investigations into greater objective understandings and representations of space.

Abstractly conceived, lived space appears an untrammelled freedom, but in its possibilities it invites, as a blank canvas does, both control and opposition – whether artistic, mensurative, literary, political, or religious. When discussing space, our general focus is on its possibilities for control and resistance, with more specific attention given to its measurement and administration, as well as on human movement through space. Our volume will examine various operations of the spatial imagination and their impact on the construction of both physical and political space. It will speak not only to the function of and operating norms behind the pictorial depiction of space but to the connection between memory and place, religious and secular geography, the structuring effects of politics on the norms of landscape art, the possible spatial liberations in literature, and the importance of precise mensurative quantification for the use of space.

This topical complex reveals the understanding and representation of physical space in pre-modern China are not simply manifestations of a highly personal artistic preference or mathematic precision. Broad cultural definitions of a territory, the restrictions such definitions impose, and the expressive power of borders and boundaries, both in the secular and sacred worlds, have a deep and abiding impact on the ways in which physical space and its representations are formulated. Physical space was not treated merely as an area to be depicted precisely; borders were not just linear marks. Often in current scholarship physical space is discussed primarily as an area to be hegemonically controlled or occupied, with a ruling population supervising its domination and management. In order to truly probe the deeper import and effects of space, we must press for insight into its cultural facets. As experts in pre-modern Chinese geography, art, and science have demonstrated, the depiction and treatment of physical space in pre-modern China was developed in modes distinct from China's early European counterparts.¹ Here, we shall uncover structures underlying the mensurative and representational activities involved in forming terrestrial and celestial spatial relationships.

In both its sacred and mundane aspects, pre-modern Chinese viewings of space are often grounded in its panoptic representation, its visual segments based on the sense of a whole. Local areas of the empire, for instance, are grounded in a sense of empire as totality. Indeed, the understandings and representations of part and whole, of sacred and mundane, and even of terrestrial and celestial are to some extent mirrors of each other. Our volume will approach the exercise of the spatial imagination across five general areas: pictorial representation,

¹ See, for instance, Vera Dorofeeva-Lichtmann, "Ritual Practices for Constructing Terrestrial Space (Warring States-Early Han)," in *Early Chinese Religion, Part One: Shang Through Han (1250 BC-220 AD)*, ed. John Lagerway and Marc Kalinowski (Leiden: Brill, 2009); D. Jonathan Felt, *Structures of the Earth: Metageographies of Early Medieval China* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Asia Center Publications, 2021); Fan Lin, "The Local in the Imperial Vision: Landscape, Topography, and Geography in Southern Song Map Guides and Gazetteers." *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 23 (2017): 10–39; Hsin-mei Agnes Hsu, "Structured Perceptions of Real and Imagined Landscapes in Early China," in *Geography and Ethnography: Perceptions of the World in Pre-Modern Societies*, edited by Kurt A. Raaflaub and Richard J. A. Talbert, 43–63. Malden, Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010; Vladimír Liščák. "'Wu-Yue' (Five Marchmounts) and Sacred Geography in China." *Archív Orientální* 62 (1994): 417–27; Gil Raz, "Daoist Sacred Geography," in *Early Chinese Religion, Part Two: The Period of Division (220–589 AD)*, 1399–422. Leiden: Brill, 2010; James Robson, "Buddhist Sacred Geography," in *Early Chinese Religion, Part Two: The Period of Division (220–589 AD)*, edited by John Lagerway and Pengzhi Lü, 1353–97. Leiden: Brill, 2010; Donald J. Wyatt and Nicola di Cosmo, eds. *Political frontiers, ethnic boundaries and human geographies in Chinese history*, New York: Routledge, 2003.

literary description, cartographic mappings, the mathematical quantification of space, and the ritual realm. Each of these areas offers a seminal, indispensable aspect. While acknowledging that the variety of our target sources permit multiple approaches, we aspire to address a shared body of questions that principally concern the conceptualization and depiction of space. How the representation of space is affected by artistic norms, how literature can reveal nuances in space's definition and use, how mathematical quantification of space was not merely for symbolic purposes,² how ritual aspects intimately affect secular divisions of space³ – these investigations promise to expand our comprehension of the complexities of the spatial imagination.

The topics around which the volume is organized correspond to what we identify as significant characteristics informing an analysis of the spatial imagination. Topic one, “The Organization of Aesthetic Space,” broached by Martin Powers and Foong Ping, will investigate the aesthetic norms behind the production of landscapes as well as spatially defined bureaucratic structures affecting the ranking of artists. Topic two, “Moving Through Imperial Space,” covered by Alexis Lycas and Vincent Leung, will examine how landscapes were expressed in written form, whether in travel narratives or poetry. Topic three, “Geo-encoding of Sovereign Space,” explored by Agnes Hsu-Tang and Linda Rui Feng, will appraise cartographic orderings of the Chinese world. Topic four, “The Calculus of Administrative Space-Time,” investigated by Daniel Morgan, will consider the import of objective mensuration, even within political or metaphysical concerns. Our final topic, “The Abrogation of Ritual Space,” as considered by Garret Pagenstecher Olberding, will assess ritual aspects of spatial organization.

Numerous questions are inspired by the essays that pertain to the spatial imagination, of which I enumerate only a few:

1. If facts are embedded in discursive structures, as they inevitably are, how does that alter our estimation of the structural shifts across time in representational art?
2. How are precise factual quotients in the measurement of space significantly valued for symbolic or representational purposes?
3. In what ways does the observing gaze influence the structure of space in a memorial circumstance?
4. How does memory guide the emplacement of space?

² As Daniel Morgan explains in his essay, such symbolic purposes are underscored in the work of such esteemed sinologists as Marcel Granet.

³ The interplay between the ritual and the secular aspects of space are discussed in various essays, particularly those by Linda Feng and Garret Olberding.

5. How do religious organizations of space impact its secular organization and what does the transgression of religious boundaries effect?
6. By what means can we trace the effect of political power in the evaluation of what is good art, or true science, within the premodern circumstance, particularly as it relates to the evaluation or representation of space?
7. In what ways can the literary imagination liberate one from a totalitarian state geography?

The scholarly literature on the spatial imagination, when conceived broadly, would cover a dizzyingly vast range of topics, pertaining to geography, administration, ritual, diplomacy, the articulation of space in literary works, landscape art, and so forth. In English language scholarship, examples of relatively recent work touching more focusedly on the issues discussed in the volume are Mark E. Lewis' *The Construction of Space in Early China* (SUNY Press, 2006), which exhaustively catalogues various levels of spatial construction, from the micro-level of the body to the macro-level of the cosmos, and Francesca Bray, Vera Dorofeeva-Lichtmann, and Georges Métaillé's edited volume, *Graphics and Texts in the Production of Technical Knowledge in China* (Brill, 2007), which speaks specifically to maps and mapping sensibilities pertaining to physical space. More philosophical work on space has been pursued in recent decades by scholars such as François Jullien, for example in his *The Great Image Has No Form: On the Non-object Through Painting* (University of Chicago Press, 2003). Naturally, there are also innumerable art historical studies pertaining to the aesthetic representation of space.⁴ To reiterate, this volume will narrow its focus on the spatial imagination as it pertains to the exercise of political power and the possibilities of liberation through space, in either knowledge structures or literary expression, as well as the memorialization of place in political systems. Below I offer a brief encapsulation of the argumentative thrust of each essay.

⁴ Following are several sample sinological studies: Foong Ping, *The Efficacious Landscape: On the Authorities of Painting at the Northern Song Court* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015); Martin Powers, "When Is a Landscape like a Body?," in *Landscape, Culture, and Power in Chinese Society*, ed. Wen-hsin Yeh (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Dorothy C. Wong, "The Mapping of Sacred Space: Images of Buddhist Cosmographies in Medieval China," in *The Journey of Maps and Images on the Silk Road*, ed. Philippe Fôret and Andreas Kaplony (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Natasha Heller, "Visualizing Pilgrimage and Mapping Experience: Mount Wutai on the Silk Road," in *The Journey of Maps and Images on the Silk Road*, ed. Phillippe Forêt and Andreas Kaplony (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Hsin-mei Agnes Hsu and Anne Martin-Montgomery, "An Emic Perspective on the Mapmaker's Art in Western Han China," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 17, no. 4 (2007); and Michael Sullivan, *The Birth of Landscape Painting in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962).

Political power, even that which is spatially expressed, is most deeply enconced in the knowledge systems that underlie it. These knowledge systems express themselves in both text and graph, including in seemingly apolitical pictorial representations such as landscape art. Martin Powers' essay expounds on how in the ninth through eleventh centuries, a "factual" sensibility (*shi* 實) became more significant not only for the civil service examinations and government policy debates but also for pictorial art. In pictorial art, in the Northern Song, there arose a new way of displaying reality, through the employment of multiple interfering sightlines, and thus a new way of knowing the world. In pictorial art, Powers argues, "the treatment of space is contingent upon specific epistemological assumptions."⁵ Within Northern Song literati painting, the facts displayed "were personal facts, such as the marks made by the artist's brush, the choice of style, literary citations or other personal interventions the artist might make."⁶ This emphasis on the facts accords with debates over the importance of real merit when deciding bureaucratic appointments.

The connection between the bureaucratic and aesthetic worlds is pursued from the political perspective in Foong Ping's tracing of the awarding of official positions to Sichuan artists in the tenth century. The ranking of the bureaucratic appointment of court artists revealed how the art product – not just in itself but of itself – could exert a spatial force: The artist was ranked not simply for the intrinsic quality of the art but for how the art product of itself – through the figure of the artist and his spatially defined position at court – expressed political influence. An artist's title could demonstrate his service "as a constituent element of a ruler's authority. By examining the titles that artists were permitted or prohibited, we better understand the roles art played in representing legitimate rule."⁷ Furthermore, the ranking of artists and their works was bound to artistic space as a product of inter-state relations. According to Foong, "painting culture was a distinguishing product of the Shu region, playing a central role in inter-kingdom trade and diplomacy."⁸ The titular awards "formalized Sichuan's painting styles and family traditions as cultural products distinct to this geographic region", expressing the "the independence and regional power of Shu rulers just before Song reunification."⁹

5 See p. 12.

6 See p. 13.

7 See p. 30.

8 See p. 52.

9 See p. 30.

Though it investigates spatially organized memory rather than bureaucratic organization, Alexis Lycas' essay continues this theme, broadly described, of spatially demarcated assertion of political power in his exposition of Li Daoyuan's arrangement of imperial space in the *Shuijing zhu*. Therein Li "emplaces" imperial space through his travels. Li privileges memorialized sites, those with local or broader significance, and the memory that undergirds that privilege, his commentary serving as "a synthesis of geographical knowledge approached through a river study and a compendium of the cultural memory of the Empire."¹⁰ According to Lycas, Li regarded spatial locations as the aggregate of human movement through time, localizing temporal significances and shaping spatially the connections between temporal events, within the location itself, but also across locations. Through such, the chronological and topographical interpenetrate. Although Li records the material characteristics of the places he visits, he also emphasizes their symbolic and literary value drawn from the narratives and signs of their historical import. Naturally, these sites are situated within the broader imperial frame, for these localized experiential perceptions are the connections that bind and form an imperial space.

Literary rebellion against the imperial frame is the subject of Vincent Leung's investigation into the *Chuci*. These elegiac poems, Leung argues, defiantly resisted homogenizing imperial spatial norms, offering a "poetics of displacement," acting as a "literary fallout of the spatial contention of the Qin-Han empires."¹¹ After introducing the rise of Chu lyric, a phenomenally popular form among the Han elite, Leung asks why these poems attracted such attention. Though they are not "landscape poetry" (*shanshui shi* 山水詩), do not take landscape, or nature, "as their primary object of poetic elaboration," a thematic thread running throughout the poems is a consistent interest in landscape: "In every *Chuci* poem, the narrative is always framed within a landscape or, at a minimum, situated within certain spatial relations."¹² Their spatial framing ties closely with the affective state of the poet, their traveling and gazing on their surroundings "to fulfill a lack,"¹³ a literal spatial displacement borne of a frustration with an upside down, corrupt world. Rather than regarding the imperial world as being well-ordered – the crucial attribute of a properly governed state – with clear governmental orders circulating without obstruction, the *Chuci* poems saw the empire as a failed chaos. As outlined in his stele inscriptions, the Qin emperor envisioned a carefully demarcated,

¹⁰ See p. 56.

¹¹ See p. 79.

¹² See p. 85.

¹³ See p. 88.

perfectly functioning spatial organization, teeming with activity and reflecting moral propriety. But the landscapes described in the *Chuci* poems are desolate, “scattered with unwelcoming deities among things out of place.”¹⁴ The Chu spatial vision is thus the inversion of the Qin: “While the Qin stele inscriptions speak of a universal order with proper placement of all things, the *Chuci* imagines an inescapable chaos where everything is continually out of place and nothing can ever be at rest anywhere.”¹⁵

How sovereign territory is cartographically represented is the subject of Agnes Hsu-Tang’s and Linda Rui Feng’s essays. Agnes Hsu-Tang’s analyzes the hermeneutic implications of a second-century CE painted cartographic image’s placement within its tomb, specifically its situation directly in line with the gaze of the tomb owner’s painted image. Being installed in a tomb, the map is already something of a contradiction, for it is not necessarily meant to reflect any lived, perambulated space but a space useful for the dead. In this postmortem context, the mapped place is a mimicking of reality. What renders this particular mapped tomb image unique compared to other excavated cityscape images is that “artistic intention may have been ancillary to an imagined functionality.”¹⁶ This mental map is, Hsu-Tang emphasizes, a socio-political construct, a domain only partially represented to insinuate a great expanse, employing axonometric perspective, with all objects to size, giving the viewer a sense of their actual dimensions. Any spatial relation in the map is thus “situational,” portraying pedestrian movement and not a consistent scale. What is truly striking about the image, Hsu-Tang points out, is that it is empty of any sign of life. In this lies a provocative juxtaposition: while its construction is lived, its finalized space absents any human form, functioning, Hsu-Tang hypothesizes, as a mental map for the tomb owner’s “wayfinding” in the world of the dead.

The combination of secular and religiously inflected knowledge, applied to the comprehension and political use of terrestrial space, is the subject of Linda Rui Feng’s essay, wherein she grapples with multifarious forms of knowledge from the Tang dynasty pertaining to the origin of the Yellow River. These diverse conceptions, Feng warns, should not be framed as contestations between the “inaccurate” and “accurate.” New discoveries did not displace older conceptions; for instance, Mount Kunlun continued to be treated as an ultimate origin, this mythical name forcibly applied over non-Chinese geographic referents lying outside Chinese territory. Such demands we acknowledge that the “longue durée of

¹⁴ See p. 93.

¹⁵ See p. 93.

¹⁶ See p. 106.

knowledge formation was a contingent and disjunctive one, spanning an interface between myth and geography, between collective imagination and the assimilation of new evidence.¹⁷ In her examination she focuses on descriptions of the river's upper reaches found in *leishu* 類書, official geographical treatises and a Buddhist geography relying on Xuanzang's 玄奘 travels, in addition to informal narratives speaking to waterways, such as the *Youyang zazu*'s 酉陽雜俎 discussion of underground channels or the prose works in the *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 devoted to the category of "Water". Further complicating the study of the river's course are distinctions made between those portions that lie within and outside the barriers of Chinese territory, distinctions that affect the organization of knowledge about the river. Those scholars who wished to avoid prioritizing the area outside of Chinese territory would either follow "the river's source inside China's borders" or "chart the river's flow in reverse."¹⁸ In sum, the river becomes a site of intertwined, conjoined knowledge systems for which objective mensuration does not in itself provide an acceptable resolution.

Yet as Daniel Morgan's evaluation of celestial calculations reveals, objective mensuration should not be considered necessarily subsumed to political or religious forms of knowledge, though it can be and is frequently pressed into their service. Indeed, Morgan demonstrates that scholars are incorrect when they insist that religious or symbolic objectives invariably govern the appropriation and use of calculations of celestial movements, of the binding of time to space. Morgan challenges the insistence that Chinese calendrics deals exclusively with time. As he underscores, measurements of time depend on the movement of space. *Li* 曆 are not calendars in the common definition; they are not tables of dates and months. Previous modern scholarly arguments about *li*, and Chinese calendrics and astronomy in general, assert their general lack of scientific or speculative interest. But *li*, Morgan detailedly illustrates, are more like algorithms, though the involved calculations are certainly not rote. Through these *li*, measures of time can be converted to spatial positions, and doing so, *li* are "transformational" and thus can be connected to the transformations of the *Changes* 易經: "Round and square, heaven and earth – space and time are *in communication* (*tong* 通), which means that you can *pass freely* (*tong* 通) from one to the other and back."¹⁹ However, this connection to the *Changes* does not render the mathematics behind *li* simply symbolic numerology. The vocabulary of the *Changes* is connected to *li*

¹⁷ See p. 124–125.

¹⁸ See p. 131.

¹⁹ See p. 177.

calculations exegetically, “a heuristic framework . . . towards ‘a mathematical research on the rationality of change.’”²⁰

In the final essay, Garret Pagenstecher Olberding analyzes the abrogation of a ritualized definition of space in the pursuit of diplomatic missions. Intrinsic to the profession of the diplomat is the potential to upend political arrangements but also intrinsic are his rhetorical reframings, of either the mission or the current state of affairs. These destabilizing potentials underlie the administrative regulation of travel abroad, but they furthermore underly the ritual obligations imposed before departure and during the mission. The unsanctioned crossing of boundaries was a severe offense in one’s ritualized duty to the state. Similarly, the prejudicial treatment of the diplomat as “guest” was also a danger to the state. Guests from within accepted cultural groups received treatment somewhat distinct from those who weren’t. Yet it was within purview of the diplomat, as one who might, over the course of his mission, rhetorically or personally transgress ritualized norms, to ally himself with the foreign, “monstrous” other and contribute to the reshaping of his sovereign’s hegemonic space.

²⁰ See p. 181.

