MEANDERING EYES

Shifting Perspective on Visual Representation
Through Speculative Drawing

by
Ji Xi Qian

A thesis
presented to the University of Waterloo
in fulfillment of the
thesis requirement for the degree of
Master of Architecture

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2026
© Ji Xi Qian 2026

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

ABSTRACT

With the introduction of artificial intelligence and ongoing technological advances in modern architecture, there is a steady decline of human and metaphysical depth in design as our imagination becomes visually passive. The mystical and sublime are often neglected in favour of function and efficiency in contemporary design and drawing practices. Architectural drawings do not need to rely solely on "realism" and hyperaccuracy. Instead, drawings that deviate from these conventional practices allow designers to introduce movement, atmosphere, and experiential depth. Drawing conventions exist and evolve with societal demands, yet they should not constrain the creative mind.

This thesis investigates how diverse, non-perspectival spatial principles in drawing and the fantastical qualities of mythology can serve as essential tools for enhancing visual imagination. It explores modes of visual representation beyond the dominant post-Renaissance linear perspective to analyze the distinctive ways diverse cultures and histories perceive, experience, and document space, rhythm, and time.

The thesis culminates in a speculative drawing exercise depicting an experiential journey through a museum of fantastical allusions to primordial Chinese myths. The narrative essence of myth, coupled with the spatio-temporal format and viewing experience of traditional Chinese handscroll painting, lends to the development of an alternative approach to spatial projection. Through this new model of drawing, I aim to apply the principles of spatial construction in various non-perspectives into a visual collage, moving from one mode of spatial expression and worldview to another. It is a shift in modes of visual representation as it is a shift in spatial thinking and perception.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude and excitement at having a committee filled with exceptionally knowledgeable and brilliant architects who share a deep passion for drawing.

First, I would like to thank my thesis supervisor, Val Rynnimeri, who has always been so enthusiastic and encouraging about what is essentially a two-year-long art project. Thank you for your wisdom, unique references, and contagious passion during the drawing process, and for your endless patience and commitment to the unfamiliar topic of Chinese primordial myths. Thank you also to my committee member, Fiona Lim Tung, who constantly inspired me with your immense technical expertise in visual representations, spatial thinking, and drawing principles. Thank you for always challenging me with careful questions and considerations to fine-tune and enhance the thesis. To my external reader, Jon Soules, thank you for coming along on this wild ride, for your extraordinary insights in drawing, and for your inventive ideas for further exploration.

My deepest appreciation to my mom, dad, grandparents back home, and friends; thank you for bearing with me as I drew, groused, and drew some more. Thank you for sticking by me during this difficult journey and for your unwavering love and support throughout my life.

Finally, a special thank you for a passing comment made during the creation of the drawing that made me realize what I truly intended with this thesis. Thank you for my Ah-Ha! moment.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Author's Declaration *ii*
Abstract *iii*
Acknowledgments *iv*
List of Figures *vii*

00 INTRODUCTION **1**
0.1 Thesis Structure *9*
0.2 Thesis Methodology *10*

01 A MATTER OF NON-PERSPECTIVE **15**
1.1 Linear Perspective 18
1.2 Pre-Renaissance Medieval Symbolic *22*
1.3 Chinese Projection 26
1.4 Persian Miniatures 36
1.5 Hejduk's Axonometric Degree Zero 40
1.6 Aspective 44
1.7 Words & Characters 48

02 FRAGMENTATION OF CHINESE MYTHOLOGY **52**
2.1 Fragmented, Historicized, Curated 54
2.2 Primordial Chinese Myths *58*

03 MEANDERING EYES 61

3.1 Final Handscroll Drawing Exercise 61

3.2 *Creations Series* *70*

3.2.1 Pangu Creates the World 71

3.2.2 Nüwa Creates Humanity 72

3.2.3 Nüwa Mends the Sky 75

3.3 *Divine Lessons Series* *78*

3.3.1 Suiren and the First Fire 79

3.3.2 Fuxi's Eye of Knowledge 82

3.3.3 Shennong and Agriculture 85

3.4 *Celestial Bodies Series* *88*

3.4.1 Houyi and the Ten Suns 89

3.4.2 Chang'e and the Moon 93

3.4.3 The World Beyond 97

04 CONCLUSION 100

BIBLIOGRAPHY 104

LIST OF FIGURES

FRONT MATTER

xxi Fig. 1.1 Drawing by author. A speculative illustration of the Chinese myth, Houyi and the Ten Suns. A preliminary segment of the final drawing.
Drawing by author.

INTRODUCTION

2 Fig. 1.2 Collage by Aldo Rossi, Eraldo Consolascio, Bruno Reichlin and Fabio Reinhart, *The Analogous City*, 1976. Image of collage from Hans Van Der Heijden as part of a book review, "Think Differently," for Cameron McEwan's *Analogical City*, 2024. A collage combining architectural fragments of diverse origins, an exercise in thinking differently about space.
Image from: Van der Heijden, Hans."Think Differently." Review of Analogical City, by Cameron McEwan. Earth, Milky Way: Punctum Books, 2024. Carpenter's Eyes: Texts by Hans Van der Heijden. https://hvdha.com/en/think-differently/.

3 Fig. 1.3 Detail segment of *Old Town of Xinchang* by Drawing Architecture Studio, 2017. An experimentation of two-sided axonometric projections (plan and elevation) inspired by Persian miniature paintings. Elements such as buildings, trees, and vehicles, people "unfold" from central roads.
Image from: "Old Town of Xinchang." Domus Archive. Februart 15, 2017. https://www.domusweb.it/en/news/2017/02/15/drawing_architecture_studio_old_town_of_xinchang_.html.

3 Fig. 1.4 Drawing by Jimenez Lai, Bureau Spectaular, *insideoutsidebetweenbeyond*, 2014, collection SFMOMA. Reconsidering urban architecture inside, outside, between, and beyond the monotonous banality of modern cities.
Image from: Lai, Jimenez.*"Bureau Spectacular insideoutsidebetweenbeyond." SFMOMA. 2014. https://www.sfmoma.org/exhibition/bureau-spectacular/.*

12 Fig. 1.5 Photograph by @Shujianyang, 2016. The Temple of Heaven in Beijing is a Ming Dynasty temple. The platform stairs and roof structure mimic three rings with a shared centre, a symbol of the heavens. To offer sacrifices to the heavens, sites of worship need to reflect the heavens and be recognizable to the gods and deities.
Image from: Photograph by @Shujianyang. Wikimedia Commons. Uploaded March 23, 2016. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Temple_of_Heaven_20160323_01.jpg.

CHAPTER 1: A MATTER OF NON-PERSPECTIVE

14 Fig. 1.6 Drawing by Paul Rudolph, *Cohen Residence*, Florida, 1952-1953, perspective section, image from the Archives of The *Paul Rudolph Institute for Modern Architecture.*
Image from: "Cohen Residence." Archives of The Paul Rudolph Institute for Modern Architecture. https://www.paulrudolph.institute/195306-cohen-residence.

14 Fig. 1.7 Drawing by Karaitiana Te Korou, sketch of 'Ua Rongopai,' 1866. Image from "The Maori Response to Gothic Architecture," Deidre Brown, 2000. Frontality is a fundamental principle in Māori architecture. Buildings, particularly the meeting house (*wharenui*) are not simply buildings and are addressed the same way one would to another human being. The Māori address the face rather than the body.
Image from: Brown, Deidre. "The Maori Response to Gothic Architecture." Architectural History 43 (2000): Page 261. https://doi.org/10.2307/1568696.
Work Referenced: Brown, Deidre."Maori Architecture - whare Marori." The Encyclopedia of New Zealand. https://teara.govt.nz/en/maori-architecture-whare-maori/print#:~:text=Meeting%20the%20meeting%20house.

16 Fig. 1.8 Diagram by author. The relationship between ways of seeing, thinking and representing diagram.
Drawing by author.

17 Fig. 1.9 Diagram by author. Scale of visual of representation diagram.
Drawing by author.

18 Fig. 1.10 Diagram by author. Linear perspective representation diagram.
Drawing by author.

19 Fig. 1.11 Diagram by author. Linear perspective principles diagram.
Drawing by author.

20 Fig. 1.12 Painting by Paul Klee, *Uncomposed Figures in Space*, 1929. Image of painting from *Oblique Drawing*, Massimo Scolari, 2012. A painting that appears to follow linear perspective but actually follows multiple dislocated vanishing points. Klee referred to these as "stray centres" or "stray viewpoints."
Image from: Scolari, Massimo. Oblique Drawing: A History of Anti-Perspective. Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2012. Page 24.

22 Fig. 1.13 Diagram by author. Pre-Renaissance medieval symbolic representation diagram.
Drawing by author.

25 Fig. 1.14 Painting by Duccio di Buoninsegna, *Maesta*, central panel, 1308-1311. Scan of painting by unknown author. Scale of figures and perspective of architecture are from the point of view from the central figure(s).
Image from: Scan of painting by unknown author. Wikimedia Commons. Uploaded May 7, 2008. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Duccio_maesta1021.jpg.

26 Fig. 1.15 Diagram by author. Chinese projection representation diagram.
Drawing by author.

28 Fig. 1.16 Painting by Li Cheng [李成], *A Solitary Temple Amid Clearing Peaks* [晴峦萧寺图], c. 919-967, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art collection. Image of painting from *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Paintings*, Richard Barnhart et al., 2002. The painting depicts how architecture is an integrated part of the natural environment.
Image from: Barnhart, Richard, Yang Xin, Nie Chongzheng, James Cahill, Lang Shaojun and Hung Wu. Three Thousand Years of Chinese Paintings. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002. Figure 92.

31 Fig. 1.17 Close-up detail of original painting by Wang Ximeng [王希孟], *A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains* [千里江山图], c. 1113. Image of painting from China Online Museum. An example demonstrating the high distance observation principle [高远 - gaoyuan].
Image from: Crop of image by author. Image of painting from "One Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains [千里江山图]." China Online Museum. https://www.comuseum.com/painting/famous-chinese-paintings/wang-ximeng-one-thousand-li-of-rivers-and-mountains/.

32 Fig. 1.18 Close-up detail of original painting by Wang Ximeng [王希孟], *A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains* [千里江山图], c. 1113. Image of painting from China Online Museum. An example demonstrating the deep distance observation principle [深远 - shenyuan].
Image from: Crop of image by author. Image of painting from "One Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains [千里江山图]." China Online Museum. https://www.comuseum.com/painting/famous-chinese-paintings/wang-ximeng-one-thousand-li-of-rivers-and-mountains/.

32 Fig. 1.19 Close-up detail of original painting by Wang Ximeng [王希孟], *A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains* [千里江山图], c. 1113. Image of painting from China Online Museum. An example demonstrating the level distance observation principle [平远 - pingyuan].
Image from: Crop of image by author. Image of painting from "One Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains [千里江山图]." China Online Museum. https://www.comuseum.com/painting/famous-chinese-paintings/wang-ximeng-one-thousand-li-of-rivers-and-mountains/.

33 Fig. 1.20 Close-up detail of original painting by Wang Ximeng [王希孟], *A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains* [千里江山图], c. 1113. Image of painting from China Online Museum. An example demonstrating atmospheric perspective.
Image from: Crop of image by author. Image of painting from "One Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains [千里江山图]." China Online Museum. https://www.comuseum.com/painting/famous-chinese-paintings/wang-ximeng-one-thousand-li-of-rivers-and-mountains/.

34 Fig. 1.21 Painting by Ma Yuan [马远], *Angler on a Wintry Lake* [寒江独约图], c.1195. Image of painting from @石壶画会, 2024. Demonstrating the impact of the intended blank technique; the water around a lone angler is perfectly still aside from thin brushstrokes of ripples from the boat, suggesting movement on the fishing line.
Image from: Image of painting from @石壶画会. *"伍勇读史笔记之四十二｜简而刚的马远." Sohu. March 2, 2024. https://www.sohu.com/a/761284382_120926026.*

35 Fig. 1.22 Segment of original painting by Wang Ximeng [王希孟], *A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains* [千里江山图], c. 1113. Image of painting from China Online Museum. A segment of handscroll, the long format with vanishing points would widely distort the images across the scroll.
Image from: Crop of segment by author. Image of painting from "One Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains [千里江山图]." China Online Museum. https://www.comuseum.com/painting/famous-chinese-paintings/wang-ximeng-one-thousand-li-of-rivers-and-mountains/.

36 Fig. 1.23 Diagram by author. Persian miniatures representation diagram.
Drawing by author.

38 Fig. 1.24 Miniature by Mir Sayyid 'Ali, Tabriz, *Nighttime in a City*, c. 1540. Image of miniature by Ibolya Horváth, 2021. A traditional Persian miniature painting, possible folio from illustrated manuscript.
Image from: Image of miniature by Ibolya Horváth, 2021. "Nighttime in the City." World History Encyclopedia. August 24, 2021. https://www.worldhistory.org/image/14508/nighttime-in-a-city/.

39 Fig. 1.25 Miniature attributed to Aqa Mirak, *Firdausi and the poets of Ghazna*, c. 1532. Image of miniature by Evgeny Ardaev, 2012. Example of elements breaking out of the frame.
Image from: Image of miniature by Evgeny Ardaev. Uploaded March 28, 2012. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mirek_Firdousi_Gazna.jpg.

40 Fig. 1.26 Diagram by author. Hejduk's axonometric degree zero representation diagram.
Drawing by author.

41 Fig. 1.27 Plan drawing (offset lithogrph print) by John Hejduk, *Project A Diamond House*, 1969. Image from Drawing Matters archive, DMC 2303.a7.
Image from: Allen, Stan. "John Hejduk's Axonometric Degree Zero." Drawing Matters. September 23, 2019. https://drawingmatter.org/john-hejduks-axonometric-degree-zero/.

41 Fig. 1.28 Plan drawing (offset lithogrph print) by John Hejduk, *Project A Diamond House*, 1969. Image from Drawing Matters archive, DMC 2303.a8. An extrusion of the rotated plan, a degree zero axonometric representation.
Image from: Allen, Stan. "John Hejduk's Axonometric Degree Zero. Drawing Matters. September 23, 2019. https://drawingmatter.org/john-hejduks-axonometric-degree-zero/.

42 Fig. 1.29 Poster by Alex Wall, Office for the Metropolitan Architecture (OMA), *The Pleasure of Architecture*, 1983. Image by Alvin Boyarsky. Poster for the Parc de la Villette competition 1982-1983.
Image from: "[in-enaction] Drawing Ambience: Alvin Boyarsky and the Architectural Association." August 18, 2014. https://architexturez.net/pst/az-cf-166354-1408382116.

44 Fig. 1.30 Diagram by author. Aspective representation diagram.
Drawing by author.

45 Fig. 1.31 Diagram by author. Perspectival representation of a rectangle imitates the real world, losing its true eternal essence. It is not longer an accurate representation of what a rectangle is.
Drawing by author.

46 Fig. 1.32 Copy by Charles K. Wilkinson, *Funeral Ritual in a Garden, Tomb of Nakhtmin*, 1921. A section of wall painting in the tomb of Nakhtmin, in western Thebes original ca. 1479–1425 BCE. The scene depicts a garden surrounding a building with a pool in front.
Image from: "Funeral Ritual in a Garden, Tomb of Nakhtmin." The Metropolitan Museum of Art. https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/544601.

46 Fig. 1.33 Fragment of a tomb painting, original artist unknown, *Nebamun's Garden,* c. 1350 BC, 18th Dynasty. Image from The British Museum.
Image from: "Tomb-Painting." The British Museum. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA37983.

48 Fig. 1.34 Diagram by author. Words and characters representation diagram.
Drawing by author.

49 Fig. 1.35 Close-up detail of original handscroll painting by Zhao Mengfu [赵孟頫], *Autumn Colors on the Que and Hua Mountains* [鹊华秋色图], c. 1295, housed in National Palace Museum in Taipei. Image of painting from China Online Museum. Written script on the scroll notes the painting is for a close friend.
Image from: Crop of image by author. "Autumn Colors on the Que and Hua Mountains [鹊华秋色]*." China Online Museum. https://www.comuseum.com/painting/masters/zhao-mengfu/autumn-colors-on-the-que-and-hua-mountains/.*

49 Fig. 1.36 Handscroll painting by Zhao Mengfu [赵孟頫], *Autumn Colors on the Que and Hua Mountains* [鹊华秋色图], c. 1295, housed in National Palace Museum in Taipei. Image of painting from China Online Museum. Showing personal seals and colophons from artist and viewers.
Image from: "Autumn Colors on the Que and Hua Mountains [鹊华秋色]*." China Online Museum. https://www.comuseum.com/painting/masters/zhao-mengfu/autumn-colors-on-the-que-and-hua-mountains/.*

50 Fig. 1.37 Drawing by Jan Rothuizen, *Taxi Driver Shenzhen*, 2015. Drawing of a taxi driver's (Li's) home in Shenzhen. Written portions are both in English and Mandarin, showing nuances hidden in translation between languages (e.g. "钱是永远赚不够的。" Another layer of meaning may be about the cost of living, where "one can never earn enough money (to live comfortably)."
Image from: "Rothuizen, Jan. "Taxi Driver Shenzhen." Jan Rothuizen: The Soft Atlas. 2015. https://janrothuizen.nl/en/drawing/taxi-driver-shenzen-china/.

CHAPTER 2: FRAGMENTATION OF CHINESE MYTHOLOGY

54 Fig. 2.1 Photograph by unknown author, Academy of Chinese Studies, 2023. *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* [山海经], Ming dynasty copy.
Image from: Hu, Hai [胡海], *"歷史奇典《山海经》之價值." Academy of Chinese Studies. October 30, 2023. https://chiculture.org.hk/tc/china-five-thousand-years/4451.*

CHAPTER 3: MEANDERING EYES

60 Fig. 3.0.1 Photograph and drawing by author. Experiment progress sketch of the final drawing.
Photograph and drawing by author.

64 Fig. 3.0.2 Drawing by author. Rough sketch of the final handscroll, some areas are hand-drawn on trace paper, others are hand-drawn on tablet.
Drawing by author.

64 Fig. 3.0.3 Drawing by author. Final handscroll drawing, linework only, digitally hand-drawn on tablet.
Drawing by author.

64 Fig. 3.0.4 Drawing by author. Final handscroll drawing, coloured, digitally hand-drawn on tablet.
Drawing by author.

65 Fig. 3.0.5 Drawing by author. Final handscroll drawing, coloured, digitally hand-drawn on tablet.
Drawing by author.

65 Fig. 3.0.6 Diagram by author. Diagram of how the overall content of the final drawing is displayed.
Drawing by author.

68 Fig. 3.0.7 Handscroll painting attributed to Qiu Ying [仇英], *Peach Assembly of Immortals* [蟠桃仙会卷], Ming dynasty. Images of handscroll from National Palace Museum. Fig. 3.0.7a, Fig. 3.0.7b, Fig. 3.0.7c are enlarged segments of the handscroll by author.
Image from: "Forgeries Flooding the Market: The Lasting Allure and Attraction of Trendy Products." National Palace Museum. Accessed November 28, 2024. https://theme.npm.edu.tw/exh107/suzhoufakes/en/index.html.

69 Fig. 3.0.8 Handscroll painting by Ding Guanpeng [丁观鹏], *Imitation of Qiu Ying's "Spring Dawn in the Han Palace"* [仿仇英汉宫春晓图], Qing dynasty. Images of handscroll from National Palace Museum. Fig. 3.0.8a, Fig. 3.0.8b, Fig. 3.0.8c are enlarged sections of the handscroll.
Image from: "Forgeries Flooding the Market: The Lasting Allure and Attraction of Trendy Products." National Palace Museum. Accessed November 28, 2024. https://theme.npm.edu.tw/exh107/suzhoufakes/en/index.html.

70 Fig. 3.1.1 Drawing by author. Enlarged image of the first section of the handscroll, the "Creations Series."
Drawing by author.

71 Fig. 3.1.2 Drawing by author. Drawing Segment 01, an enlarged segment of the final handscroll, loosely inspired by the creation myth Pangu Creates the World.
Drawing by author.

72 Fig. 3.2.1 Drawing by author. Drawing Segment 02, an enlarged segment of the final handscroll, loosely inspired by the creation myth Nüwa Creates Humanity.
Drawing by author.

73 Fig. 3.2.2 Illustration attributed to Jiang Yinghao [蒋应镐], *Complete Picture of Mountains and Seas*, Ming Dynasty, c. 1597. Scanned image of illustration by unknown author, 2011. Illustration of the goddess Nüwa in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, showing a human head with a snake-like body.
Image from: Scanned image by unknown author. Wikimedia Commons. Uploaded October 16, 2011. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Shanhaijing_illustration_of_N%C3%BCwa.jpg.

73 Fig. 3.2.3 Cropped screenshot of Youtube video by author. Youtube video from Zheng Lu, 2021, 11:20. The goddess Nüwa in a modern Chinese Beijing opera production of *Fengshenbang* [封神榜], a play based off the novel *The Investiture of the Gods* [封神演义], 2021.
Image from: Screenshot of Youtube video by author. Screenshot from Zheng Lu. "[麒麟剧社] [郭德] 大型京剧连台本戏《封神榜》之炮烙柱 1 20210223 封神榜 炮烙柱Av459613319, P1." Youtube. March 15, 2021. 11:20. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ejUAn9hRGQ.

73 Fig. 3.2.4 Cropped screenshot of Youtube video by author. Youtube video from Zheng Lu, 2021, 11:39. The goddess Nüwa in a modern Chinese Beijing opera production of *Fengshenbang* [封神榜], a play based off the novel *The Investiture of the Gods* [封神演义], 2021.
Image from: Screenshot of Youtube video by author. Screenshot from Zheng Lu. "[麒麟剧社] [郭德] 大型京剧连台本戏《封神榜》之炮烙柱 1 20210223 封神榜 炮烙柱Av459613319, P1." Youtube. March 15, 2021. 11:39. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ejUAn9hRGQ.

75 Fig. 3.3.1 Drawing by author. Drawing Segment 03, an enlarged segment of the final handscroll, loosely inspired by the myth Nüwa Mends the Sky.
Drawing by author.

76 Fig. 3.3.2 Architectural reconstruction drawing by Chongqing Cultural Relics and Archaeology Research Institute [重庆市文物考古研究院], 2001-2003. A series of elevation views of the *Wuyang* stone que [乌杨石阙], Han Dynasty.
Image from: Architectural reconstructon drawing by Chongqing Cultural Relics and Archaeology Research Institute [重庆市文物考古研究院], 2001-2003. Image of drawing from Chongqing Mobile TV. https://www.cbg.cn/show/5055-3588247.html.

76 Fig. 3.3.3 Photograph by @仁和里拾柒路过人间, 2023. Photograph of the *Wuyang* stone que [乌杨石阙], Han Dynasty, located in the Chongqing China Three Gorges Museum in Chongqing, China.
Image from: Photograph by @仁和里拾柒路过人间. Baidu post. December 24, 2023. https://mbd.baidu.com/newspage/data/dtlandingsuper?nid=dt_6047123880116934425.

76 Fig. 3.3.4 Illustration by Xiao Yuncong, 女媧補天圖, c. 1596-1673. Image of illustration by @Meidosensei, 2020. The goddess Nüwa mending the sky with the five-coloured cosmic stone from *Lisaotu* [离骚图], an illustrated woodblock book by Qing dynasty artist Xiao Yuncong, 1645.
Image from: Illustration by Xiao Yuncong, 女媧補天圖, c. 1596-1673. Image of illustration by @Meidosensei. Uploaded October 10, 2020. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Shanhaijing_N%C3%BCwa_Mends_the_Heavens.svg.

78 Fig. 3.4.1 Drawing by author. Enlarged image of the second section of the handscroll, the "Divine Lessons Series."
Drawing by author.

79 Fig. 3.4.2 Drawing by author. Drawing Segment 04, an enlarged segment of the final handscroll, loosely inspired by the fire myth Suiren and the First Fire.
Drawing by author.

80 Fig. 3.4.3 Photograph by Gary Todd, 2008. Entry gate to the Suiren Tomb [燧皇陵 - *Suihuangling*] located in the Shangqiu Fire Culture Scenic Area in Henan, China.
Image from: Photograph by Gary Todd. Flicker. November 30, 2008. Uploaded October 15, 2013. https://www.flickr.com/photos/101561334@N08/10286963676.

80 Fig. 3.4.4 Photograph from @宗谱链, 2024. Statue of Suiren in the Suiren Tomb memorial park.
Image from: Photograph from @宗谱链. "三皇五帝—燧人氏时代（前1.5万年—前7724年）." Sohu. July 1, 2014. https://www.sohu.com/a/789784656_120100667.

81 Fig. 3.4.5 Photograph by unknown author. Relief featuring imagery from the fire myth Suiren.
Image from: Photograph by unknown author. Baidu Baike. https://baike.baidu.com/item/燧人氏/162079.

81 Fig. 3.4.6 Photograph from Yangzhou Museum [扬州博物馆]. Decorative etchings of a coiled serpent on the back of a Western Han Dynasty bronze *yangsui* mirror [西汉蟠螭纹铜阳燧], located in the Yangzhou Museum in Jiangsu, China, 8.0cm diameter.
Image from: "铜阳燧." Yangzhou Museum [扬州博物馆]. https://www.yzmuseum.com/index.php?g=home&m=collection&a=show&id=94.

81 Fig. 3.4.7 Photograph by @军影迷踪, 2014. An enlarged *yangsui* sculpture replica for demonstrating how the ancient solar lighter is used, located in the Guo State Museum in Sanmenxia City [三门峡虢国博物馆] Henan, China.
Image from: Photograph by @军影迷踪. Baidu post. December 28, 2024. https://mbd.baidu.com/newspage/data/dtlandingsuper?nid=dt_4729723450132488766.

82 Fig. 3.5.1 Drawing by author. Drawing Segment 05, an enlarged segment of the final handscroll, loosely inspired by the mythical tales of the primordial deity Fuxi.
Drawing by author.

83 Fig. 3.5.2 Photograph by @宁静致远, 2024. Mountain relief of Fuxi at Mount Xian in Hubei, China, 2014.
Image from: Photograph by @宁静致远. Meipian post. December 4, 2024. https://www.meipian.cn/58zq9qah.

83 Fig. 3.5.3 Photograph by @步来克兔旅游攻略, 2025. Mountain relief of Fuxi at Mount Xian in Hubei, China, 2014, showing the adjacent landscape design
Image from: Photograph by @步来克兔旅游攻略. Baidu post. September 15, 2025. https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1843321259112789545&wfr=spider&for=pc.

83 Fig. 3.5.4 Photograph by Ibolya Horváth, 2020. Image of the deities Fuxi and Nüwa with their tails intertwined.
Image from: Photograph by Ibolya Horváth."Fuxi & Nuwa." World History Encyclopedia. April 30, 2020. https://www.worldhistory.org/image/12141/fuxi--nuwa/.

84 Fig. 3.5.5 Close-up detail of image by author. Image by Dr. Jennifer N. McIntire, 2015. Detail (top area) of a t-shaped silk funeral banner, *Funeral banner of Lady Dai (Xin Zhui)* found in the *King Ma Tomb* [马王堆汉墓], unearthed in Hunan, China, from the Western Han Dynasty (c. 168 BC). Currently housed in the Hunan Provincial Museum. The top right area shows imagery of the sun and a golden crow, while the top left area has depictions of the moon and a jade rabbit and lunar toad. Lunar toad [月蟾], imagery associated with the moon and yin energy. Three-legged golden crow [三足金乌], imagery associated with the sun and yang energy.
Image from: McIntire, Jennifer N. "Funeral banner of Lady Dai (Xin Zhui)." Smarthistory. August 9, 2015. https://smarthistory.org/funeral-banner-of-lady-dai-xin-zhui/.

84 Fig. 3.5.6 Image by One World Nations Online. Primordial bagua diagram.
Image from: One World Nations Online. https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/Chinese_Customs/bagua.htm.

85 Fig. 3.6.1 Drawing by author. Drawing Segment 06, an enlarged segment of the final handscroll, loosely inspired by the teachings of the culture hero Shennong, especially in relation to agriculture and farming.
Drawing by author.

86 Fig. 3.6.2 Photograph by General Office of Hubei Provincial People's Government. Shennong Altar, a cultural site located in Shennongjia Forest District, Hubei, China, built in 1991.
Image from: Photograph by General Office of Hubei Provincial People's Government. https://www.hubei.gov.cn/jmct/jcms/sjyc/202108/t20210830_3727536.shtml.

86 Fig. 3.6.3 Photograph by @Crazy.traveler เที่ยวจะเครซี่, 2026, cropped by author. Entry gate of the Shennong Altar marked by twin buffalo horn statues.
Image from: Photograph by @Crazy.traveler เที่ยวจะเครซี่, cropped by author. March 12, 2026. Trip.com. https://my.trip.com/moments/detail/shennongjia-147-142886781?locale=en-MY.

86 Fig. 3.6.4 Photograph by unknown author, 2013. Statue of Shennong located in the Mount Shennong Scenic Area in Qinyang City, Henan, China.
Image from: Photograph by unknown author. "Shennong Statue." Tripadvisor. April 2013. https://www.tripadvisor.ca/Attraction_Review-g1016985-d1805472-Reviews-Shennong_Statue-Zhuzhou_Hunan.html

88 Fig. 3.7.1 Drawing by author. Enlarged image of the third section of the handscroll, the "Celestial Bodies Series."
Drawing by author.

89 Fig. 3.7.2 Drawing by author. Drawing Segment 07, an enlarged segment of the final handscroll, loosely inspired by the sun myth Houyi and the Ten Suns.
Drawing by author.

90 Fig. 3.7.3 Photograph by @kudomomo, 2011. Sanxingdui Bronze Sacred Tree statue [三星堆青铜神树], late Shang dynasty (c. 1200 - 1050 BC), permanently housed in the Sanxingdui Museum in Sichuan, China.
Image from: Photograph by @kudomomo. Flickr. August 16, 2011. https://www.flickr.com/photos/9751325@N02/6049044176

90 Fig. 3.7.4 Illustration by Sichuan Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, c. 1986. Image from Jinsha Site Museum[成都金沙遗址博物馆], 2021. Scaled artifact illustration of the Sanxingdui Bronze Sacred Tree statue.
Image from: Jinsha Site Museum [成都金沙遗址博物馆]. "Exhibition of Archaeological Graphics." July 2021. https://www.jinshasitemuseum.com/site-75/info/2761.

90 Fig. 3.7.7 Image from @Whipsandchains, 2009. Three-legged golden crow detail found on a wall relief, Han Dynasty.
Image from: Image from @Whipsandchains. Wikimedia Commons. Uploaded April 19, 2009. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Threeleggedbird_han_dynasty.jpg.

91 Fig. 3.7.8 Diagram by author. Comparison of the modern Chinese character and oracle bone script for the word "solstice" [至].
Drawing by author.

91 Fig. 3.7.9 Diagram by author. Comparison of the modern Chinese character and oracle bone script for the word "west" [西].
Drawing by author.

91 Fig. 3.7.10 Diagram by author. Diagram showing the spatial parameter of the sun's path as observed and derived by the ancient Chinese people.
Drawing by author.

92 Fig. 3.7.11 Cropped screenshot of Youtube video by author. Youtube video from 台視新聞 TTV NEWS, 2024, 1:40. A parhelion where an optical illusion of light shows multiple suns in the sky at once. A recent phenomenon took place in Chengdu, Sichuan, China on August 2024, where an illusion of seven suns appeared in the sky at once.
Image from: Screenshot of Youtube video by author. Screenshot from 台視新聞 TTV NEWS. "四川成都驚現「7個太陽」網友：后羿在哪?." Youtube. August 20, 2024. 1:44. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bmqIvMamN5Y.

93 Fig. 3.8.1 Drawing by author. Drawing Segment 08, an enlarged segment of the final handscroll, loosely inspired by the myth Chang'e Leaps to the Moon.
Drawing by author.

94 Fig. 3.8.2 Diagram by author. Diagram depicting the three rings with a common centre shown in the temple stairs, roof, and adjacent mooncake embellishments.
Drawing by author.

95 Fig. 3.8.3 Photograph by @Shujianyang, 2016. The Temple of Heaven, an imperial place of worship during the Ming and Qing dynasty, Beijing, China, built c. 1420.
Image from: Photograph by Shujianyang. Wikimedia Commons. Uploaded March 23, 2016. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Temple_of_Heaven_20160323_01.jpg.

95 Fig. 3.8.4 Photograph by @missKaren, 2006. Mooncakes, flat, round pastries resembling the full moon and eaten during the Mid-Autumn festival.
Image from: Photograph by @missKaren. Flikr. September 30, 2006. Uploaded October 6, 2006. https://www.flickr.com/photos/47489771@N00/262305960/.

95 Fig. 3.8.5 Diagram by author. Diagram showing the sun's path changing throughout the year.
Drawing by author.

95 Fig. 3.8.6 Diagram by author. Diagram showing a plan view of the arcs in Fig 3.8.5 forming three rings with a common centre.
Drawing by author.

95 Fig. 3.8.7 Photograph by author, 2026. Jade vessel used for ritual purposes, its surface is ornamented with three rings. Currently housed in the Shanghai Museum.
Photograph by author, 2026.

97 Fig. 3.9.1 Drawing by author. Drawing Segment 09, an enlarged segment of the final handscroll depicting the land after the creation of humanity and the world.
Drawing by author.

CONCLUSION

101 Fig. 4.1 Drawing by author. Second iteration sketch of Segment 09, where each area unfolds towards its corresponding nautical direction. East and West are correct in this iteration.
Drawing by author.

101 Fig. 4.2 Drawing by author. Segment 09 from the current speculative handscroll (linework) as comparison. East and West are flipped to ensure a continuous landscape.
Drawing by author.

103 Fig. 4.3 Drawing by author. Doodle of author drawing the final handscroll draft.
Drawing by author.



00 INTRODUCTION

"Design is not merely a rational, technical and performative task; architecture relates us to the course and depth of culture and makes our existence understandable. Architecture helps us give human existence its human as well as metaphysical meaning; we do not dwell only in space, place and time; we also dwell in hidden myths and spirit."

- Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*[1]

DRAWING AS PRODUCTION

Present advancements in digital design software and artificial intelligence in architecture have opened new and exciting avenues for developing complex structures, new sustainability measures, and enhanced visual capabilities. However, in this era of computer-based imaging, there is a disconnect between the architect, the drawing, and the built environment.

Both in academia and in practice, the rising demand for photo-realistic renders within a narrowed time frame has altered how architects approach the drawing process. In the rapidly modernizing world, there is a tendency to gravitate towards

Fig. 1.1 (Opposite) Drawing by author. A speculative illustration of the Chinese myth, Houyi and the Ten Suns. A preliminary segment of the final drawing.

1 Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, 4th ed. (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2024), 5.

the technical, hone in on practicality, and let slip the human elements of compassion. The homogenization of architectural design in mainstream practices rarely allow for cultural nuance and emotional resonance.

There is a steady decline of human meaning in design as our imagination has become visually passive.[2] In this era of mass consumerism, hyper-productivity, and the digital revolution of the camera, the mystical and sublime are often neglected in favour of function and efficiency. As a result, drawing has become akin to a mass production of detached images[3]

Architectural drawing does not need to rely solely on function, realism, and hyper-accuracy. In fact, drawings that deviate from these practices allow the designer to introduce movement, atmosphere, and experiential depth. Drawing conventions exist and evolve with societal demands, yet they should not constrain the creative mind.

In this thesis, "realism" refers specifically to the post-Renaissance Western convention of representing and perceiving space as a pictorial likeness, a systematic imitation of nature designed to mirror human vision, particularly in association with the camera.

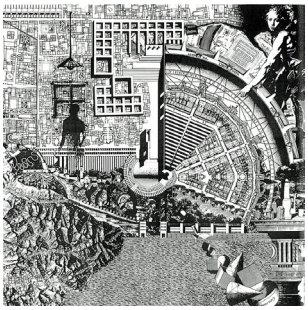


Fig. 1.2 Collage by Aldo Rossi, Eraldo Consolascio, Bruno Reichlin and Fabio Reinhart, *The Analogous City*, 1976. Image from a book review, "Think Differently," by Hans Van Der Heijden for Cameron McEwan's *Analogical City*, 2024. A collage combining architectural fragments of diverse origins, an exercise in thinking differently about space.

2 Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, 4th ed., 5.

3 Alberto Perez-Gomez, "The Historical Context of Contemporary Architectural Representation," in *Persistent Modelling: Extending the Role of Architectural Representation*, ed. Phil Ayres (New York: Routledge, 2012), 22.



Fig. 1.3 (Top, left) Detail segment of *Old Town of Xinchang* by Drawing Architecture Studio, 2017. An experimentation of two-sided axonometric projections (plan and elevation) inspired by Persian miniature paintings. Elements such as buildings, trees, and vehicles, people "unfold" from central roads.

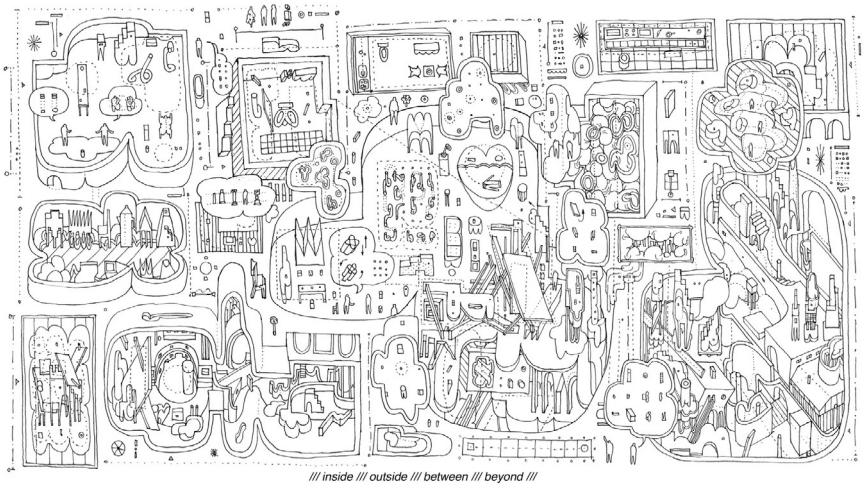


Fig. 1.4 (Bottom, left) Drawing by Jimenez Lai, Bureau Spectaular, *insideoutsidebetweenbeyond*, 2014, collection SFMOMA. Reconsidering urban architecture inside, outside, between, and beyond the monotonous banality of modern cities.

DRAWING AS EXPERIENCE

> *"It is evident that the act of drawing mingles perception, memory and one's sense of self and life: a drawing always represents more than its actual subject matter. Every drawing is a testimony [...] A drawing does not reproduce the tree as it manifests itself in the objective reality; the drawing records the way the tree is seen or experienced."*
>
> - Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Thinking Hand* [4]

In architectural practice, drawing is a crucial communication tool. It allows for the translation of the physical and the imagined into spatial forms, a dialogue between the material and the mental, the physical and the spiritual, the external and the internal. Architects put pen to paper (or napkin) to realize and convey thoughts, ideas and solutions.

The modern reliance on digital software has rendered hand drawing near obsolete in the fast-paced field of design. Once an irreplaceable skill in the architect's toolkit, young designers are putting down the pencil in favour of the computer for its accuracy and efficiency. Although hand sketches are still prevalent in the initial stages of design, computerized design is much preferred to actualize and refine.

Yet drawing is a process of thinking and discovery for the architect. More than the production or reproduction of physical reality, drawing by hand embodies and manifests the experience of our design, walking through the space in our minds. The way we draw impacts the breadth of our imagination and reveals how we understand space and the world.

---

4 Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Thinking Hand: Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2009), 92.

This thesis is not a critique of digital imaging and computer-based design. It is merely a kind reminder that the computer is not the only tool we possess, and not to forget the sensation and craft of hand drawing in a rapidly evolving field.

DRAWING AS VISUAL TRUTH

Particularly in the West and contemporary practice, the linear perspective introduced by Filippo Brunelleschi in the early Renaissance dominates design thinking today. Perspective is a key component of architectural drawing, as it allows us to approximate what we see.[5] Most modern viewers are so attuned to perspective in drawing that anything that strays from these rules may appear distorted, backward, or wrong.[6] Architects are also affected by this rational ordering of space. Our current understanding of spatial representation is contained within the pictorial view.

Erwin Panofsky argues that perspective is more than a simple technique; rather, it reflects a culture's perception and shapes how it engages with the world.[7] Perhaps this helps explain our preference for the computer as a primary design tool. It reflects how our modern society values productivity and rationalization, which in turn stems from our use of perspective, an embodiment of the pictorial view, our visual truth.

In our era of the image, perspective carries a degree of legitimacy. Photographs capture what is considered to be objective reality. John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* challenges the truth of the image and promotes the idea of unconscious bias in both the image and its context, where "the way we see things

---

5 James S. Ackerman, introduction to *Oblique Drawing: A History of the Anti-Perspective* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2012), viii.

6 Ibid.

7 Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, trans. Christopher S. Wood (New York: Urzone Inc, 1991).

is affected by what we know and what we believe."[8] The creation, reception, and interpretation of the image are specific to the culture and the individual.

Yet, there is more than one visual truth. In *Oblique Drawing*, Massimo Scolari investigates "non-perspectival" forms of representation found across cultures and throughout history, such as parallel projection. He argues that linear perspective is neither the only nor the best way to represent objects.[9] Instead, all foreign and historical visual forms found in other cultures, such as Chinese, Egyptian, Byzantine and pre-Renaissance art, are equally true depictions of the world.

DRAWING, MYTH, AND IMAGINATION

> *"A capacity to imagine, to liberate oneself from the limits of matter, place and time, must be regarded as the most human of our qualities."*
>
> - Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Thinking Hand* [10]

As all modes of representation are visual truths of the world, all myths of the world are also simultaneously true.

Myths are symbolic, metaphysical truths that embody the collective narrative and knowledge of humanity. In contemporary culture, we often think of myth as a story or belief that is untrue or at most a fanciful tale. Yet myths seem to have a power over people. Societies across the world continue to celebrate their mythology through rituals, art and architecture.

---

8 John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1972), 8.

9 James S. Ackerman, introduction to *Oblique Drawing: A History of the Anti-Perspective*, vii.

10 Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Thinking Hand: Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture*, 17.

Myths are a spectacle of the human imagination, linking the human consciousness across time. Filled with primordial beings and extraordinary circumstances, mythology is beyond the constraints of the perceivable, physical world yet it is also rooted in it.

From the earliest cave paintings in France to the fragmented abstractions of Picasso, "the function of the artist is the mythologization of the environment and the world."[11] Poets, musicians, writers, as well as architects, create a line to connect to that which transcends the physical world, time, and the senses.[12]

"The people who keep mythology alive are artists."

- Joseph Campbell, *1988* [13]

This thesis is an investigation of how diverse, non-perspectival spatial principles in drawing and the fantastical qualities of mythology can serve as essential tools to enhance visual imagination. It explores alternative conventions and rules of spatial thinking to broach speculative potentials, where ideas are liberated from the limitations of a single worldview.

Moreover, the final version of the drawing will be digitally hand-drawn on a tablet to experiment with an intermediate medium between traditional hand-drawing and computer-aided design.

---

11 *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth*, episode 3, "The First Storyteller," performed by Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers, aired June 23, 1988, on PBS.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

THESIS STRUCTURE

Chapter 1 is a theoretical chapter, including an investigation of non-perspectives outside the modern pedagogy of the pictorial view. It places a key focus on five modes of representation: Pre-Renaissance Medieval Symbolic, Chinese projection, Persian Miniatures, John Hejduk's Axonometric Degree Zero, and Aspective.

Chapter 2 is a brief history of Chinese mythology and its fragmented, historicized, and curated nature. The section concludes with identifying a selection of primordial myths from the initial chaos to the creation of humanity and the birth of civilization.

Chapter 3 is an archive of the final speculative handscroll drawing and the accompanying process sketch. Documentation and descriptions are provided for nine primordial Chinese myths that were used for inspiration. Each myth is presented in a continuous series of episodes. Included in this section is a detailed explanation of select segments, the drawing process, and embedded artifacts, compiled in a subsequent appendix for reference.

THESIS METHODOLOGY

This thesis is composed of three research stages that are used as points of reference to inform the final speculative handscroll drawing: diagrammatic analyses of a selection of non-perspective visual representation methods, literary analyses to consolidate a potential Chinese mythological canon, archival research, film analyses, and personal accounts of physical artifacts depicting myths, and using drawing as analysis to understand the optimal way in representing each artifact in the final drawing exercise.

STAGE 1: NON-PERSPECTIVE REPRESENTATIONS

The thesis begins with identifying a selection of non-perspectival modes of representation. Each method is examined through diagrammatic analyses to understand the spatial logic and the varying cultural, social, and philosophical values at play. Each diagram is then arranged in a visual scale of relative "realism" and "abstraction," where "realism" is defined as how close the representational method imitates the pictorial view.

STAGE 2: A MYTHOLOGICAL NARRATIVE

There is no archaic, systematic record of ancient Chinese myth. The thesis primarily references *Ancient Chinese Mythology* [中国古代神话] by Chinese scholar Yuan Ke [袁珂], the first consolidated record of mythology in China, to consolidate a series of mythological narratives for the final drawing. In addition, a translated English edition of the book, *Dragons and Dynasties: An Introduction to Chinese Mythology* will also be referenced. This thesis is centred on primordial myths, from the initial chaos to the first primordial deities and cultural heroes. Embedded within these stories are explanations for the creation of humanity, solar rotations, fire, agriculture, and how the ancient Chinese civilization saw and understood the world.

STAGE 3A: COLLECTION OF ARTIFACTS

The next stage compiles a selection of urban and archaeological artifacts, cultural art forms, and modern rituals and celebrations that materialize aspects of the creation myths in the physical world. Urban artifacts will take precedence. Photographs, illustrations, and information on urban and archaeological artifacts such as temples, statues, accessories, instruments, and funerary banners are gathered and examined from museum exhibitions, archives, art auction catalogues and documentaries. Modern recordings portraying mythological figures and narratives from Beijing Opera, such as the *Investiture of the Gods* [封神演义], are also reviewed. In addition, personal photographs and artifacts of traditional cultural practices, foods, and festival trinkets in the modern era are included.

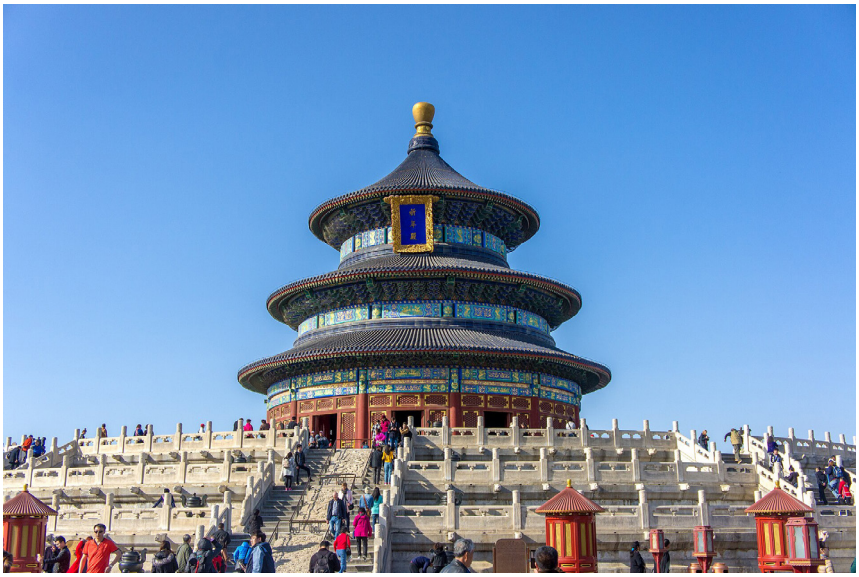


Fig. 1.5 (Right) Photograph by @Shujianyang, 2016. The Temple of Heaven in Beijing is a Ming Dynasty temple. The platform stairs and roof structure mimic three rings with a shared centre, a symbol of the heavens. To offer sacrifices to the heavens, sites of worship need to reflect the heavens and be recognizable to the gods and deities.

STAGE 3B: ARTIFACT ANALYSIS

Artifacts collected in Stage 3A are analyzed through observational sketching in person or through collected imagery. Each artifact will be analyzed through different types of representational drawing from Stage 1, such as John Hejduk's axonometric degree zero, also known as the drop-back view. These sketches investigate the advantages and disadvantages of each drawing method. Some artifacts may require a hybrid of these representation types to best showcase particular aspects.

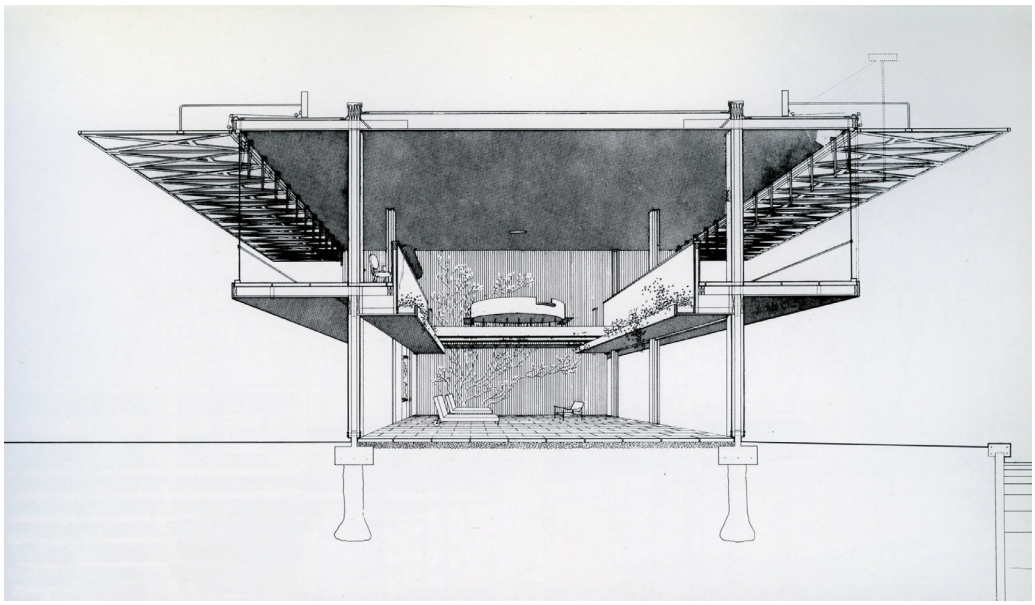
STAGE 4: THE FINAL DRAWING

The final drawing is a speculative handscroll that illustrates an experiential journey through a museum of fantastical allusions to primordial Chinese mythologies. Artifacts from Stage 3A are integrated into the drawing based on ideal drawing methods explored in Stage 3B.

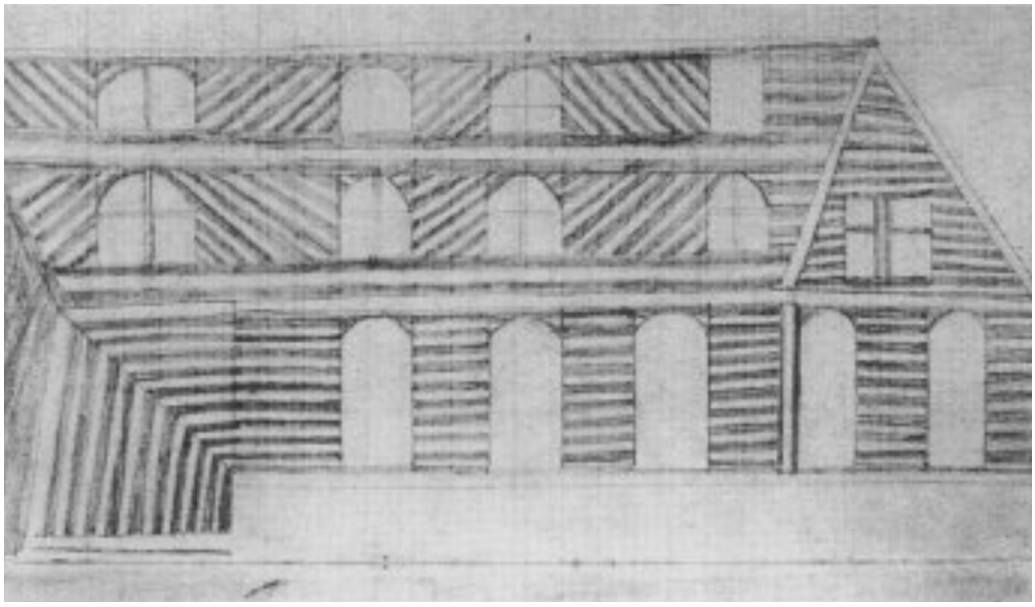
It takes inspiration from speculative drawings such as the *Pleasure of Architecture* poster by OMA architect Alex Wall, departing from physical reality and the "fixed rules" of technical drawings. Scale and linear perspective are abandoned in favour of the narrative aspects of other non-perspectival representations, such as the pre-Renaissance style, in which important elements are drawn larger, and the receding horizon disappears. Further inspiration includes *The Water Parliament - Bangkok 2100*, a set of fictional re-imaginings from Tyler Lim's master's thesis, as well as Drawing Architecture Studio's *Old Town of Xinchang*, showing multi-projection narratives that break the constraints of the physical world by combining orthographic, axonometric, and perspective drawings to create a collage of spatial storytelling.

POSITIONALITY & ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

My position as a Chinese-Canadian who speaks Mandarin at an intermediate level allows me to engage with and participate in Chinese festivities, rituals, and art forms. However, my limited reading ability in Mandarin may lead to misinterpretations or mistranslations of Mandarin sources at an academic level. As such, consulting with a second or third person who is fluent in Mandarin or well-versed in the research subject is needed to ensure content accuracy and cultural nuance, but does not exclude the existence of a language gap. In addition, the selected origin myths are broadly associated with the Han Chinese ethnic group and do not include specific mythologies from national minority groups in China. Thus, it is not a complete representation of all Chinese mythology.



MASTERY AND SKILL?



"NAIVE" AND "FLAWED" ?

01 A MATTER OF NON-PERSPECTIVE

"[...T]he hegemony of perspective has prevented consideration of other equally important methods of representation."

- Massimo Scolari, *Oblique Drawing* [14]

Building on Panofsky's theory of perspective as symbolic form, Scolari highlights the link between visual representation, thinking, and seeing. Certain types of projection illustrate varied ways of thinking, which may ultimately lead to distinct ways of perceiving space and built forms. In *Oblique Drawings*, Scolari notes, "[...]images are not just a form of art but a form of thought, a projection of a way of life."[15]

Scolari argues that the current perspectival dominance has narrowed our approach to spatial representation.[16] Not adhering rigorously to the rules of perspectival projection is often a deciding factor in an artist's skill. Architects have similar preconceptions. We are trained to view certain drawing types as mastery and skill, while other visual forms, namely non-perspectives, foreign or from antiquity, are often regarded as "naive, "flawed," "primitive," or even "fake."

Fig. 1.6 (Opposite, top) Drawing by Paul Rudolph, *Cohen Residence*, Florida, 1952-1953, perspective section, image from the Archives of The *Paul Rudolph Institute for Modern Architecture.*

Fig. 1.7 (Opposite, bottom) Drawing by Karaitiana Te Korou, sketch of 'Ua Rongopai,' 1866. Image from "The Maori Response to Gothic Architecture," Deidre Brown, 2000. Frontality is a fundamental principle in Māori architecture. Buildings, particularly the meeting house (*wharenui*) are not simply buildings and are addressed the same way one would to another human being. The Māori address the face rather than the body.

14 Massimo Scolari, *Oblique Drawing: A History of the Anti-Perspective* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2012), 1.

15 James S. Ackerman, introduction to *Oblique Drawing: A History of the Anti-Perspective*, vii.

16 Ibid., viii.

However, these deviations are not "deficiencies" nor are they due to a lack of understanding. It is often a deliberate choice, reflecting a unique worldview and approach to spatial thinking. These images are not wrong, only different from perceptions of the modern Western eye. They exemplify opposing, embodied cultural, historical, social, and philosophical values. In fact, these alternative modes of representation have much to tell us.

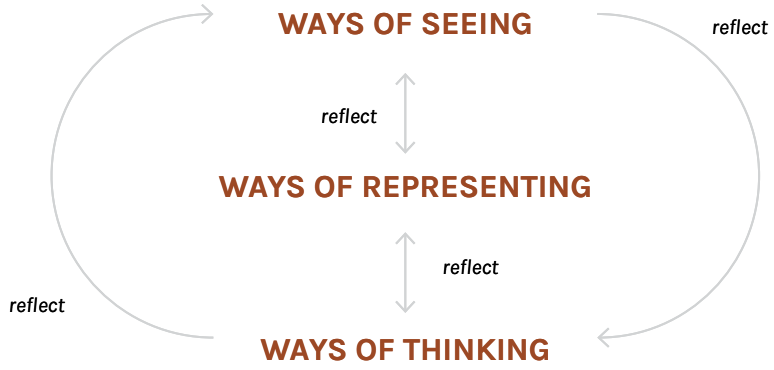
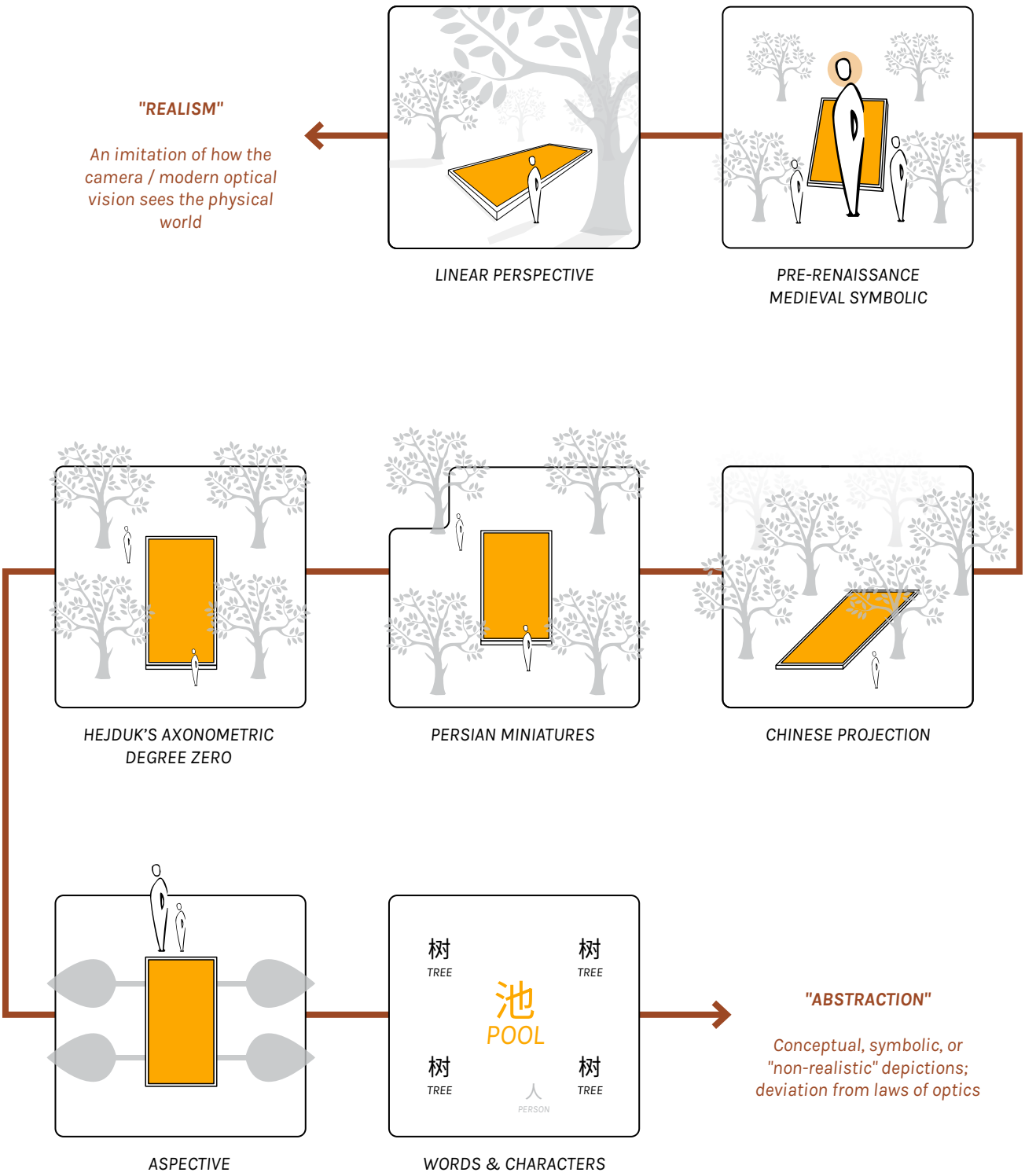


Fig. 1.8 (Right) Diagram by author. The relationship between ways of seeing, thinking and representing.

SCALE OF VISUAL REPRESENTATION

Fig. 1.9 (Opposite) Diagram by author. Scale of visual representation.

The following diagrams are a selection of "non-perspectives" to be explored in the final drawing exercise. The diagrams are arranged on a visual scale from relative "realism," defined here as resemblance to space perceived by a camera lens, to relative "abstraction." Beginning with the dominant post-Renaissance linear perspective, each subsequent representation method departs further from conventional pictorial logic and rationale.


"REALISM"
An imitation of how the camera / modern optical vision sees the physical world
LINEAR PERSPECTIVE
PRE-RENAISSANCE MEDIEVAL SYMBOLIC
HEJDUK'S AXONOMETRIC DEGREE ZERO
PERSIAN MINIATURES
CHINESE PROJECTION
ASPECTIVE
樹 TREE
樹 TREE
池 POOL
樹 TREE
樹 TREE
人 PERSON
WORDS & CHARACTERS
"ABSTRACTION"
Conceptual, symbolic, or "non-realistic" depictions; deviation from laws of optics

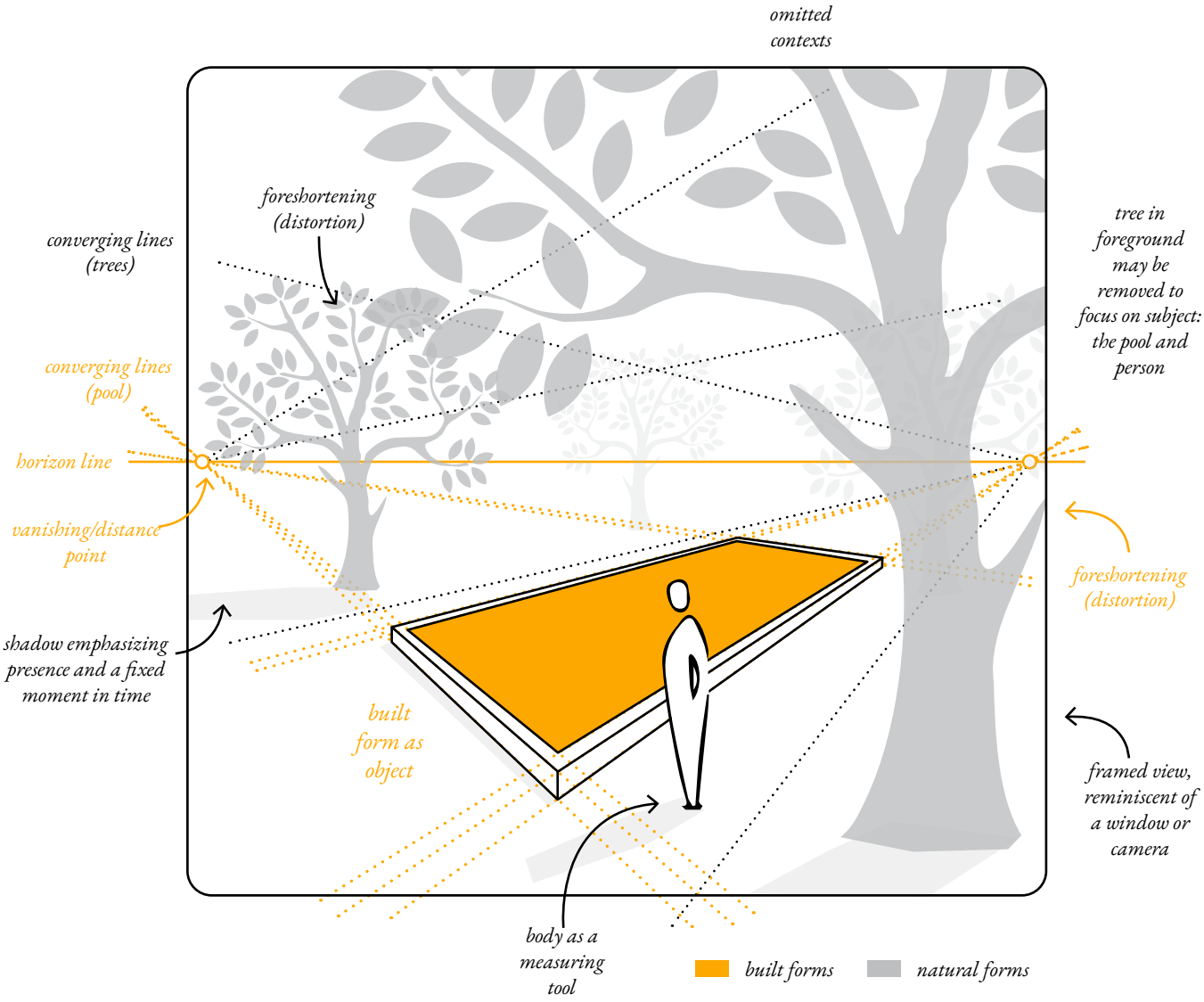


DIAGRAM:
LINEAR PERSPECTIVE

1.1 LINEAR PERSPECTIVE

Brunelleschi's linear perspective, also known as central or geometric perspective, is the practical application of central projection, a mathematical system that creates the illusion of a three-dimensional space on a flat plane by converging parallel lines at vanishing points.[17] By the end of the 16th century, linear perspective had become the convention of architectural and artistic practice in the West, "the most realistic system of representation."[18]

Fig. 1.10 (Opposite) Diagram by author. Linear perspective representation diagram.

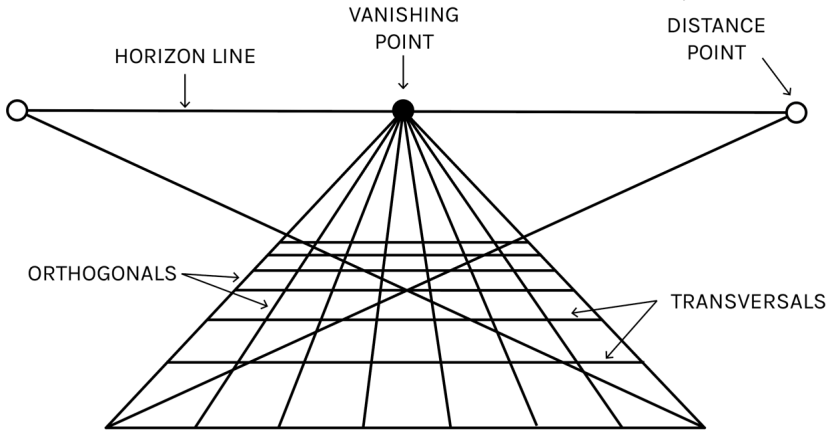


Fig. 1.11 (Left) Diagram by author. Linear perspective principles diagram

Yet perspective also has its own shortcomings. Linear perspective shows a projection of space from a single, fixed point of view at a fixed point in time. As perspective relies on a subject, the body becomes a measuring tool and point of reference for interpreting the object in space. Scolari notes that "the body is the central measuring tool for cultures that portray paintings through the painter's sight as opposed to reality."[19] All measures of perspective rely on the observer as the single point of reference. As such, linear perspective focuses on the

17 Jonathan Janson, "The History of Perspective," *Essential Vermeer*, accessed April 10, 2025, https://www.essentialvermeer.com/technique/perspective/history.html.

18 Massimo Scolari, *Oblique Drawing: A History of the Anti-Perspective*, 341.

19 Ibid., 31.

individual and, by this very nature, it can be said that linear perspective is a distortion of space, since a single individual cannot see everything at once. With this notion, Scolari argues that perspective distorts truth. We see this in foreshortening, converging parallel lines, and omitted contexts. Details are excluded, objects are cut off or obscured by shadow, depending on the time and position of the observer. In the physical world, none of these illusions are true.

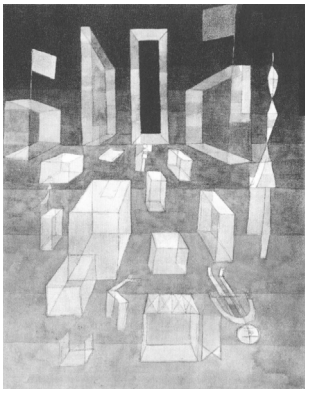


Fig. 1.12 Painting by Paul Klee, *Uncomposed Figures in Space*, 1929. Image of painting from *Oblique Drawing*, Massimo Scolari, 2012. A painting that appears to follow linear perspective but actually follows multiple dislocated vanishing points. Klee referred to these as "stray centres" or "stray viewpoints."

> *"It is significant for the visual characteristics of central perspective that it was discovered at only one time and place in man's entire history. The more elementary procedures for representing pictorial space, the two-dimensional 'Egyptian' method as well as isometric perspective [or oblique projection] , were and are discovered independently all over the world at early levels of visual conception. Central perspective, however, is so violent and intricate a deformation of the normal shape of things that it came about only as the final result of prolonged exploration and in response to very particular cultural needs."*
>
> - Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception* [20]

Scolari references artist Paul Klee's 1921 lecture on perspective, in which Klee claims that precise perspective's only true merit is its accessibility, a rulebook that anyone can follow.[21] Accurate perspective, he argues, has no symbolic significance and leaves little to the imagination, both in its creation and viewing. Klee avoided perspective in his work and drew inspiration from Cubism, a movement that rejects traditional single-point perspective and depicts objects from multiple viewpoints simultaneously. This spatio-temporal depiction can be seen as more thought-provoking and a more accurate portrayal of an objective reality than mathematical replication, not to mention being more visually interesting.

---

20 Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 283.

21 Massimo Scolari, *Oblique Drawing: A History of the Anti-Perspective*, 25.

Perspective is also the spatial illusion of control. Klee states, "the point of the entire procedure is simply to be able to exercise control."[22] This underscores how Western thought, as described by philosopher Byungchul Han, is shaped by the idea of "essence." Essence is substance; it is something solid and withstands change to assert oneself, to create presence and persist.[23] To exist, an effort is required, a desire. It is about possession and power.[24] The use of light and shadow in linear perspective further amplifies this sense of presence. Light multiplies presence, creating clear outlines and solidity.[25]

In relation to the built form, linear perspective tends to focus on the building as an object, often disconnected from its surroundings. The building becomes a subject, a static entity rather than an integrated piece of a complex, dynamic natural system.

22 Massimo Scolari, *Oblique Drawing: A History of the Anti-Perspective*, 25.

23 Byungchul Han, *Absence: On The Culture and Philosophy of the Far East*, translated by Daniel Steuer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2023), 2-3.

24 Ibid., 3.

25 Ibid., 36-37.

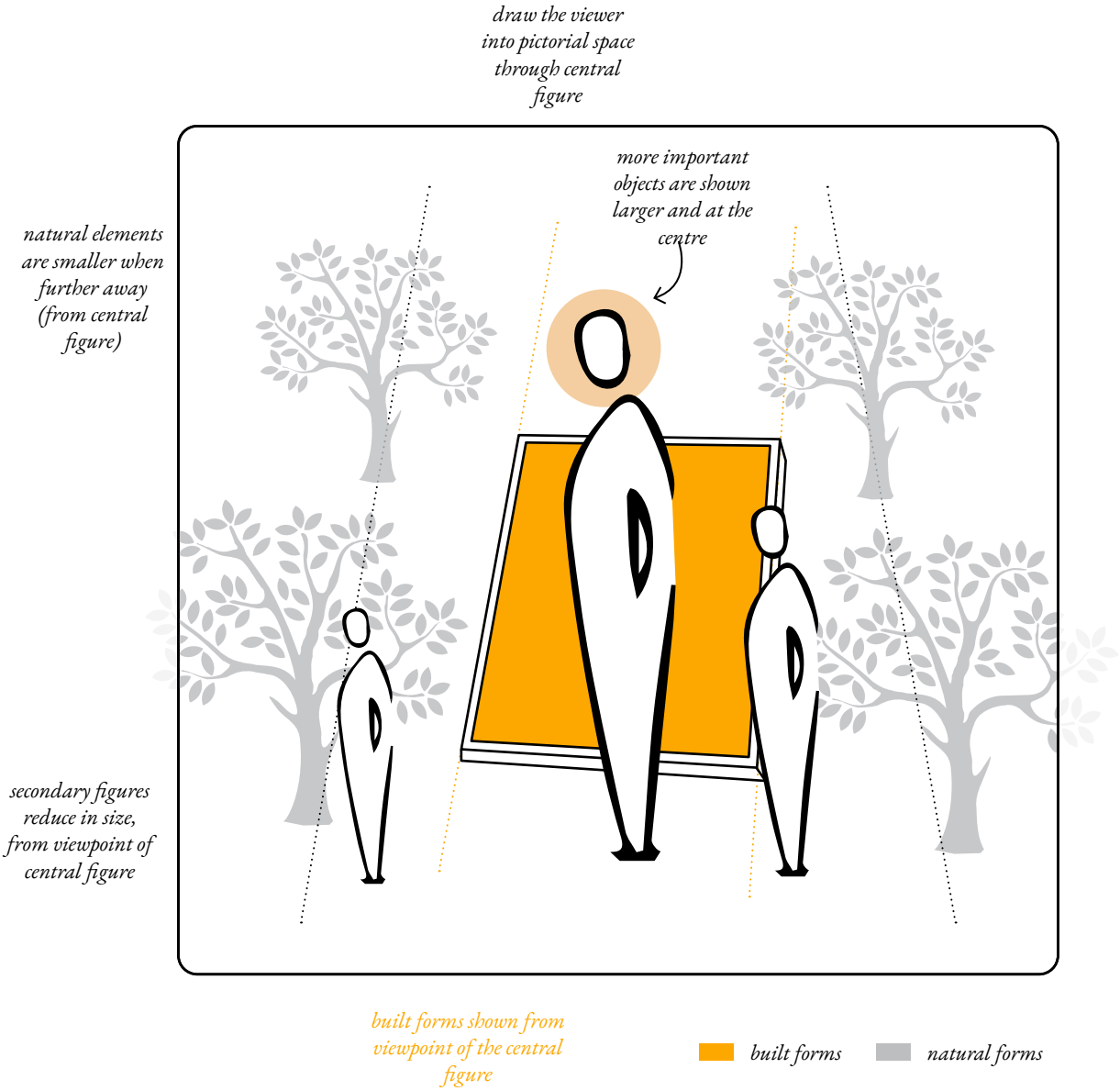


DIAGRAM: *PRE-RENAISSANCE MEDIEVAL SYMBOLIC*

1.2 PRE-RENAISSANCE MEDIEVAL SYMBOLIC

The convention of the post-Renaissance Western perspective relies primarily on scientific reasoning and rationality.[26] The use of symbolic significance in pre-Renaissance and medieval European painting contradicts realism and optical logic. As such, these types of representation have taken a back seat.

Fig. 1.13 (Opposite) Diagram by author. Pre-Renaissance medieval symbolic representation diagram.

Medieval European paintings often invert the laws of optics, creating a pictorial space that is sometimes referred to as "inverse" or "reverse perspective."[27] Central figures are drawn larger even though they are farther away in compositional space. The meaning and purpose of this type of representation have sparked much discourse among art historians and theorists. Two major theses stand at the forefront: "Hierarchical Scaling" and the "Inner View."

HIERARCHICAL SCALING

"Hierarchical scaling" posits that artists depicted figures in varying sizes and levels of detail depending on their conventional symbolic, spiritual, or social status.[28] This is the most prominent explanation for the "inconsistency" of figures in medieval composition; however, the idea relies on linear perspective as a point of reference. Vanishing points and converging lines are not relevant to medieval art, as these principles did not exist until a century later. Not only does "hierarchical scaling" perpetuate an assumed superiority of linear perspective, but it is also an oversimplification of a complex form of representation.[29]

---

26 Massimo Scolari, *Oblique Drawing: A History of the Anti-Perspective*, 341.

27 Nicole Ruta, Alistair Burleigh and Robert Pepperell, "Space and Scale in Medieval Painting Reflects Imagination and Perception," *Gestalt Theory*, vol. 44, no. 1-2 (2022): 61, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/365324027.

28 Ruta, Burleigh and Pepperell, "Space and Scale in Medieval Painting Reflects Imagination and Perception," 61-62.

29 Ibid., 64.

INNER VIEW

The "inner view" thesis argues that the different scales and arrangements of figures reflected the desire to emotionally engage the viewer with the largest, dominant figure by mentally drawing the viewer into the pictorial space to assume the figure's perspective.[30] As such, adjacent figures and objects shrink in size based on their proximity to the central figure, enabling the viewer to see the scene from his, her or their point of view. This internal embodiment enables the viewer to empathize with the central figure.[31] Artists prioritized theological and emotional meaning over external reality.

The production of medieval imagery may also be an internal process. Paintings in the Middle Ages were often religious imagery and were "tools to educate the faithful: they required active engagement and the ability to 'read' the represented story."[32] Coupled with the "inner view" theory, it is likely that medieval artists created these paintings through memory and imagination to fulfill the complex spiritual and aesthetic needs of their intended audience.[33]

30 Ruta, Burleigh and Pepperell, "Space and Scale in Medieval Painting Reflects Imagination and Perception," 61-62.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., 64.

33 Ibid.



Fig. 1.14 (Left) Painting by Duccio di Buoninsegna, *Maesta*, central panel, 1308-1311. Scan of painting by unknown author. Scale of figures and perspective of architecture are from the point of view from the central figure(s).

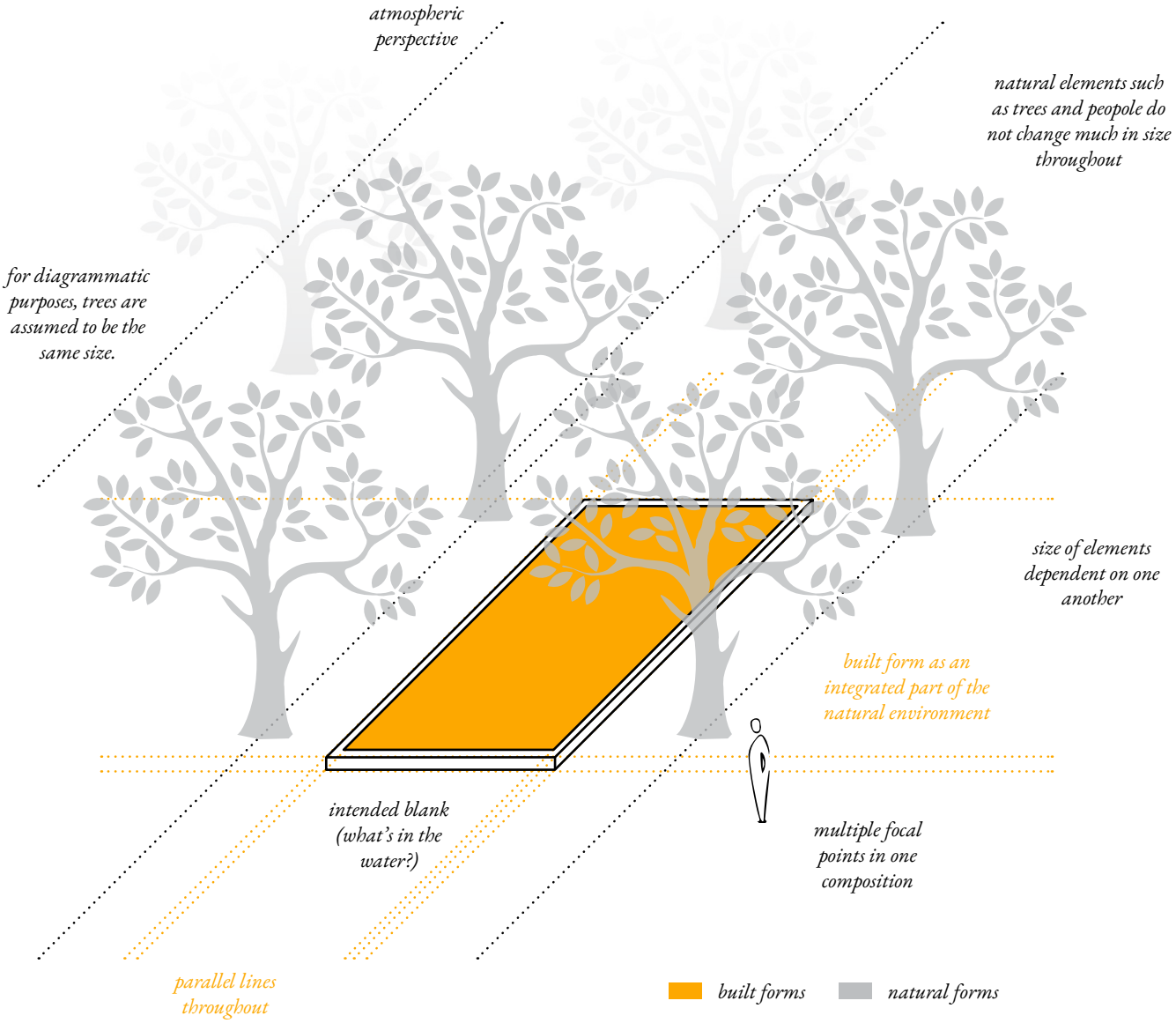


DIAGRAM:
CHINESE PROJECTION

1.3 CHINESE PROJECTION

Western linear perspective was introduced in China with the arrival of Jesuit missionaries in the late 16th century, though with little success in conversion.[34] Although they acknowledged the general beauty of the Western image, the Chinese people did not believe it was a superior form of spatial expression to their centuries-old drawing traditions. The Chinese painter sought to capture not just a literal likeness, but the inner spirit and reflection beyond direct observation, of what "the inner eye was capable of grasping."[35] Chinese painting is a recreation of space rather than a replication of space.

Fig. 1.15 (Opposite) Drawing by author. Chinese projection representation diagram.

"论画以形似，见与儿童邻。"

- 苏轼，九世纪 [36]

"He who judges painting according to the concept of resemblance shows the understanding of a child."

- Su Shi, 9th century [37]

While Western art places the artist at the centre of nature, traditional Chinese art places nature at the centre and the artist as the interpreter, the go-between. If we apply Han's theory of absence, or "non-essence," from Far Eastern thinking, this idea also reflects an embrace of change with an 'it-is-how-it-is' mindset in following the natural order. Instituting a single viewpoint is antithetical to the very roots of the Chinese mindset: "man is not the measure of all things."[38]

---

34 Massimo Scolari, *Oblique Drawing: A History of the Anti-Perspective*, 341.

35 Ibid.

36 Giacomo Bruni, "Art Theory, Mountain and Water Painting: Why Mountain and Water Painting," *Shanshui*, September 1 2020, https://www.shanshuiprojects.net/why-mountain-and-water-painting/.

37 Massimo Scolari, *Oblique Drawing: A History of the Anti-Perspective*, 348.

38 Ibid.



Fig. 1.16 Painting by Li Cheng [李成], *A Solitary Temple Amid Clearing Peaks* [晴峦萧寺图], c. 919-967, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art collection. Image of painting from *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Paintings*, Richard Barnhart et al., 2002. The painting depicts how architecture is an integrated part of the natural environment.

Far Eastern philosophy values transient beauty over eternal beauty and perfection.[39] Chinese naturalism emphasizes humanity's place within nature rather than above or apart from it. It is more appropriate to depict the natural state of the world than to impose or isolate a subject or object. Daoist thought considers the universe as a whole and the harmonious co-existence of humanity and nature.[40] Nothing should take precedence over something else, including architecture: "[...T] he Chinese were interested not in the true landscape, but in a projection of their world-view, a balanced, harmonious environment where architecture, man and nature are part of the same context."[41]

The following are a few drawing tools and techniques that characterize the distinctive method of conceptualizing space in classical Chinese painting.

"SCATTERED PERSPECTIVE" OR "MOVING VIEWPOINT PERSPECTIVE" [散点透视 - sandian toushi]

Initially, the word "perspective" did not exist in classical Chinese painting theory.[42]

散点透视 (sandian toushi), or "scattered perspective," appears to be a common modern te among Western and Chinese art theorists for the unique technique of spatial expression in traditional Chinese landscape painting that intergates multiple

39 Byungchul Han, *Absence: On The Culture and Philosophy of the Far East*, 35.

40 Xiaolu Fan and Rina Shukor, "Explaining the Beauty of Liu Bai in the Works of Ma Yuan, a Chinese Painter of the Southern Song Dynasty, with Taoist Thought," *Asian Journal of Research in Education and Social Sciences*, vol. 6, no. 3 (2024): 644-645, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/387263194.

41 Martjin des Geus, "China Projections," *Arch Daily*, March 9, 2019, https://www.archdaily.com/912723/china-projections.

42 Zhisheng Yan, "Research on the Scattered Perspective Viewing in the Era of Image," (paper presented at 2019 5th International Conference on Economics, Management and Humanities Science, Bangkok, Thailand, March 2019), https://webofproceedings.org/proceedings_series/ECOM/ECOMHS%202019/ECOMHS19231.pdf.

shifting vantage points into a single harmonious composition.[43] Scenes observed from various heights, distances and angles at different moments in time are unified across the canvas, offering an impression of infinite space. The "scattered perspective" encourages the eye to wander through a panoramic journey of space and time.

The actual terminology for the concept of "scattered perspective" is muddled. Throughout my research, I have encountered an assortment of modern terms in Mandarin and English that are used to describe this spatial technique:

In Mandarin:

散点透视 *(sandian toushi)*
"scattered-point perspective" (a literal translation)

动点透视 *(dongdian toushi)*
"moving-point perspective" (a literal translation)

游目透视 *(youmu toushi)*
"moving-eye perspective" (a literal translation)

In English:

Scattered Perspective
Moving Viewpoint Perspective
Moving-point Perspective
Moving-scattered Viewpoint
Wandering Viewpoint
Pointless Perspective

And so on...

Yan Zhisheng of Shanghai University's Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts argues that "scattered perspective" is an inappropriate term since there is no focus or converging

43 Zhisheng Yan, "Research on the Scattered Perspective Viewing in the Era of Image," 1092-1093.

points in Chinese painting.[44] If every part of the painting can be considered a point of reference, a centre, then there is no centre at all. Moreover, built forms in Chinese art are drawn in "equal angle perspective" or isometric projection [等角透视 - dengjiao toushi], where all contour lines run parallel to one another.[45] Yan proposes that terms such as "pointless perspective" or "moving viewpoint perspective" could be better suited.

"Scattered perspective" is a modern concept of spatial features in classical Chinese painting, defined by Chinese theorists in direct contrast to the Western linear perspective, termed "focus perspective" or "focal perspective" [焦点透视 - jiaodian toushi].[46] Yan states, "The concept of 'scattered perspective' was created on the basis of borrowing the Western perspective theory, and combining [it] with the characteristics of Chinese painting."[47] Professor Li Sen of Zhejiang Shuren University's School of Arts describes it as "[an] integration of two contradictory Western concepts to represent the compositional experience of Chinese painting."[48]

It is important to highlight the discourse regarding "scattered perspective" in modern Chinese art theory. Strictly speaking, "scattered perspective" is not currently a nationally recognized Chinese artistic concept, even though it is used by scholars and artists.[49] Li notes that the concept was mentioned only in passing until the mid-20th century, when "scattered perspective" began to emerge in Chinese art theory through the writings of renowned Chinese artists and art educators. It received a mixed reception.

---

44 Zhisheng Yan, "Research on the Scattered Perspective Viewing in the Era of Image," 1093.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Sen Li, "Conceptual Transmutation and Landscape Perspective: A New Interpretation of "Scattered Perspective" in Comparative Visions of the East and the West," *Theoretical Studies in Literature and Art*, vol. 43, no. 6 (2023): 138, https://tsla.researchcommons.org/journal/vol43/iss6/16/.

49 Ibid.

THREE DISTANCES METHOD
[三远法 - sanyuan]

The Three Distances Method is an ancient Chinese compositional principle, founded in the Northern Song dynasty by the painter Guo Xi [郭熙].[50] It expresses the spatial relationships of the natural environment by combining three angles of observation:

1. High Distance [高远 - gaoyuan] emphasizes the momentum of looking from the base of a mountain to the top and back down, to observe and reconstruct the sense of majesty and grandeur of towering heights.[51]

2. Deep Distance [深远 - shenyuan] describes looking from the front of a mountain to the space behind it, to observe and express depth and the complex layering of receding space in overlapping mountains, hidden valleys, and winding rivers.[52]

3. Level Distance [平远 - pingyuan] focuses on stretching the senses from a nearby mountain outward toward mountains far away, to observe and emphasize the horizontal expanses of flat, open vastness.[53]

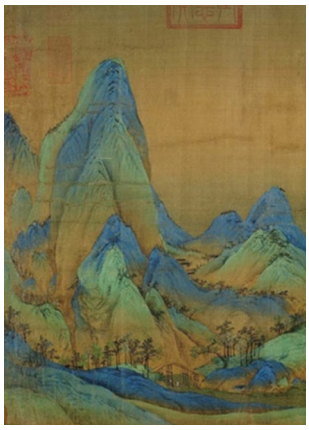


Fig. 1.17 Close-up detail of original painting by Wang Ximeng [王希孟], *A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains* [千里江山图], c. 1113. Image of painting from China Online Museum. An example demonstrating the high distance observation principle [高远 - gaoyuan].

50 Giacomo Bruni, "Art Theory, Mountain and Water Painting: Why Mountain and Water Painting," *Shanshui*, September 1 2020, https://www.shanshuiprojects.net/why-mountain-and-water-painting/.

51 Ziyi Zhu, "A Comparison of Perspective in Chinese and Western Traditional Painting and the Philosophical Thought behind It," *Art and Design Review*, vol. 12 (2024): 227, https://www.scirp.org/pdf/adr2024124_11250575.pdf.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.



Fig. 1.18 (Right) Close-up detail of original painting by Wang Ximeng [王希孟], *A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains* [千里江山图], c. 1113. Image of painting from China Online Museum. An example demonstrating the deep distance observation principle [深远 - shenyuan].



Fig. 1.19 (Far Right) Close-up detail of original painting by Wang Ximeng [王希孟], *A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains* [千里江山图], c. 1113. Image of painting from China Online Museum. An example demonstrating the level distance observation principle [平远 - pingyuan].

The Three Distances Method once again breaks away from the confines of the single fixed viewpoint. The size of elements within the painting is determined through their relationship with one another rather than in relation to the painter or the observer. In a passage from his essay "The Lofty Message of Forest and Streams [林泉高致 - Linquan Gaozhi]," Guo Xi writes:

> "山近看如此，远数里看又如此，远十数里看又如此，每远每异，所谓山形步步移也。山正面如此。侧面又如此，背面又如此，每看每异，所谓山形面面看也。如此是一山而兼数十百山之形状，可得不悉乎?"
>
> - 郭熙, 林泉高致 [54]

> *"A mountain seen up close has one aspect, and it has another a few miles away, and yet another one from further away. Its shape changes with each step. The front view of a mountain has one view, another view from the side and another from behind. Its appearance changes from every angle, as many times as it does the point of view. So, it is necessary to realize that a mountain combines in itself several thousand shapes."*
>
> Guo Xi, *The Lofty Message of Forest and Streams* [55]

54 Giacomo Bruni, "Art Theory, Mountain and Water Painting: Why Mountain and Water Painting."

55 Ibid.

VIEWING THE SMALL FROM THE LARGE
[以大观小 - yida guanxiao]

"Viewing the Small from the Large [以大观小]" is another traditional Chinese art principle, formalized by Shen Kuo [沈括] in the 11th century.[56] This idea encourages painters to observe scenery through a macroscopic view. This is an exercise that "cannot be done entirely by vision but requires the use of imagination."[57] To truly understand and portray a subject, one must see it from afar, at an angle of totality, to grasp its form, spirit, and position in the overall system.[58] Shen Kuo equates this thought process to the way one might panoramically view artificial mountains in a garden.

Unlike the practical observation method of the "scattered perspective," "viewing the small from the large" is more of a mental process. It requires the painter to transcend the limits of retinal imaging once again, recreate the essence of elements through mental imagery, and embed them into an organic whole that is dynamic and traversable. As such, multiple spatial layers should be displayed so that all layers are shown.[59]

AERIAL PERSPECTIVE / ATMOSPHERIC PERSPECTIVE
[空气透视 - kongqi toushi /大气透视 - daqi toushi]

Unlike the Western use of light and shadow, Chinese painting expresses spatial depth through aerial or atmospheric perspective. Natural phenomena such as mist, vapours, rain, snow, and dust are drawn to convey distance through hazy brushstrokes, offering a dream-like quality and eroding the



Fig. 1.20 Close-up detail of original painting by Wang Ximeng [王希孟], *A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains* [千里江山图], c. 1113. Image of painting from China Online Museum. An example demonstrating atmospheric perspective.

56 Giacomo Bruni, "Art Theory, Mountain and Water Painting: Why Mountain and Water Painting."

57 Baihua Zong, *Aesthetic Walk*, 5th ed. (Shanghai: Shanghai People s Publishing House Publishing House, 2005), quoted in Ziyi Zhu, "A Comparison of Perspective in Chinese and Western Traditional Painting and the Philosophical Thought behind It," *Art and Design Review*, vol. 12 (2024): 227.

58 Giacomo Bruni, "Art Theory, Mountain and Water Painting: Why Mountain and Water Painting."

59 Ibid.

movement and directionality that a strong light source creates.[60] This diffused light intensifies absence. Faraway objects and landforms are depicted through a faded ink wash, where things flow into other things without clear boundaries, an absence of delineation.

INTENDED BLANK OR EMPTY SPACE
[留白 - liubai]

The "intended blank" or "empty space" is a deliberate area of emptiness in Chinese paintings. More than a juxtaposition that emphasizes a subject or serves as a compositional tool, it invites the viewer into a space of imagination and contemplation. Originating from Daoist ideology, the intended blank embodies the dialectic relationship between "being" and "non-being."[61] It emphasizes the value of silence and emptiness, of non-existence, and, in this absence, a sense of space. The intended blank allows imagination to run free, beyond even the painting itself.



Fig. 1.21 (Right) Painting by Ma Yuan [马远], *Angler on a Wintry Lake* [寒江独约图], c.1195. Image of painting from @石壶画会, 2024. Demonstrating the impact of the intended blank technique; the water around a lone angler is perfectly still aside from thin brushstrokes of ripples from the boat, suggesting movement on the fishing line.

60 Massimo Scolari, *Oblique Drawing: A History of the Anti-Perspective*, 354.

61 Xiaolu Fan and Rina Shukor, "Explaining the Beauty of Liu Bai in the Works of Ma Yuan, a Chinese Painter of the Southern Song Dynasty, with Taoist Thought," 645.

FORMAT: THE HANDSCROLL

As the techniques above suggest, Chinese spatial thinking emphasizes context. Traditional Chinese painting also expresses this emphasis through its dominant artistic medium: the handscroll.

The handscroll combines time, movement and space in both its narrative composition and the viewing experience. It is an intimate experience that seeks to envelop the viewer in the mind of the painter. Viewers are in direct physical contact with the artwork. Typically laid flat on a table, scrolls are unrolled and read in shoulder-width sections from right to left. The viewer sets their own pace on where to linger and where to move past, going back and forth at will. Each section unravels a new scene, yet the content remains seamless and coherent. The fluidity of the handscroll allows for the expression of objects as part of a scenario rather than as a singular subject.

The long format of the traditional Chinese handscroll leaves little room for perspectival representation, as vanishing points would widely distort the images across the scroll. Instead, receding obliques remain consistent throughout. This continuity also creates a "moving viewpoint perspective," which further shifts focus away from the human gaze and encourages the viewer's eyes to dwell and roam. Space in Chinese painting and thinking is fluid; the handscroll enables crafting a space that detaches from the physical world and enters the metaphysical realm, an infinite possibility of imagined spatial expression.[62]



Fig. 1.22 (Left) Segment of original painting by Wang Ximeng [王希孟], *A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains* [千里江山图], c. 1113. Image of painting from China Online Museum. A segment of handscroll, the long format with vanishing points would widely distort the images across the scroll.

62 Ziyi Zhu, "A Comparison of Perspective in Chinese and Western Traditional Painting and the Philosophical Thought behind It.", 227-228.

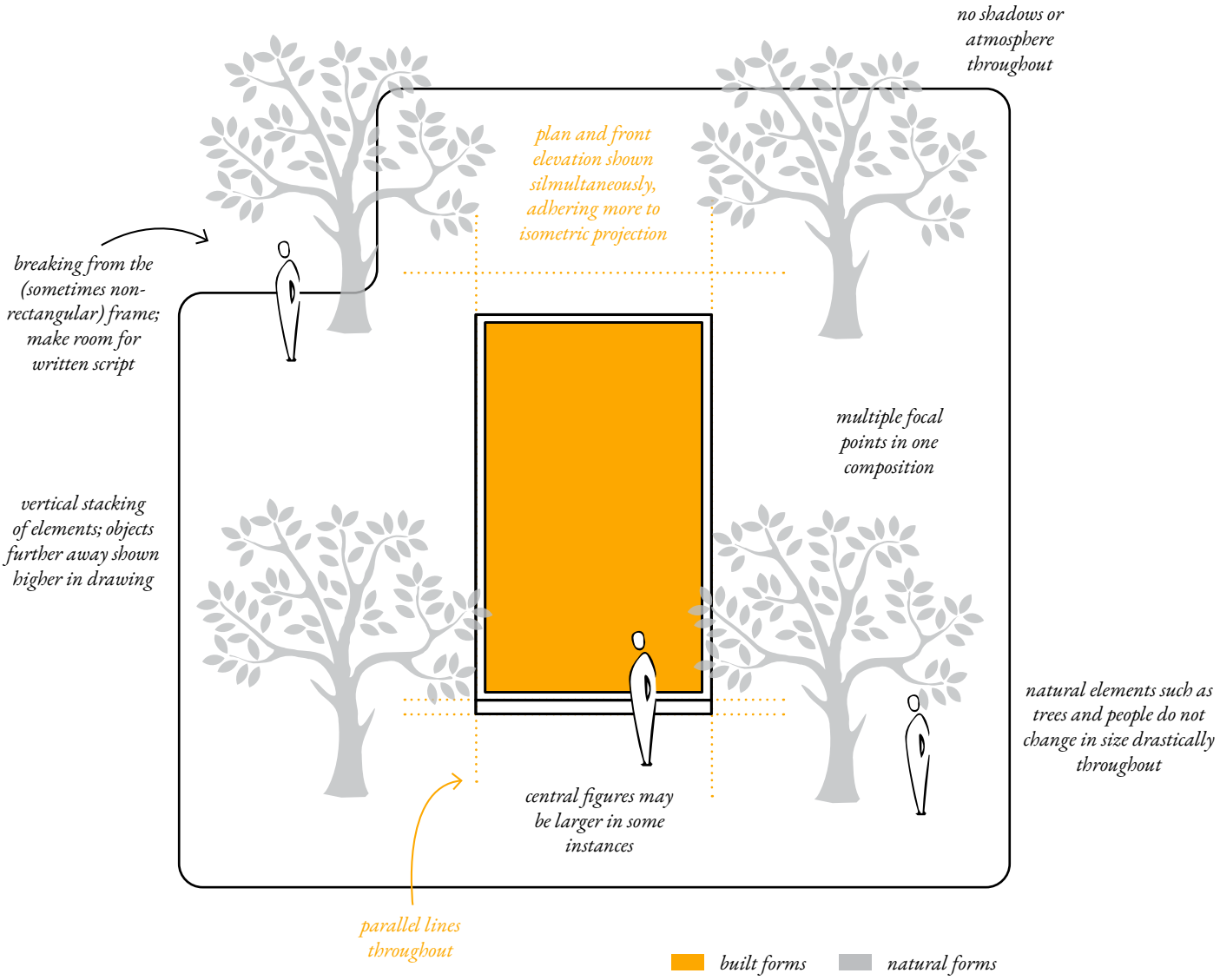


DIAGRAM:
PERSIAN MINIATURES

1.4 PERSIAN MINIATURES

Persian miniature paintings employ a system of non-linear spatial techniques to form a distinctive "Persian perspective." These miniatures also possess spatial features seen in the representation methods discussed above, including "inverse" perspective, a scaling hierarchy of essential figures, and isometric projection, which maintain consistent, parallel lines and scale in architectural forms.[63]

Fig. 1.23 (Opposite) Diagram by author. Persian miniatures representation diagram.

A defining characteristic is the use of "vertical perspective," a non-linear spatial approach where elements are "stacked" vertically across the drawing to indicate depth and distance.[64] Objects further away are placed higher on the picture plane rather than shrinking in size, allowing for a layered, multi-focal narrative space. Moreover, architectural interiors and exteriors, as well as times of day, are sometimes shown simultaneously. Through this unique spatial arrangement, the Persian miniature transcends space and time; several events, narratives, and settings co-exist on a single plane.[65]

All elements are presented in a dense composition of meticulous detail, standing stark against the page. This intensity, brought forth by vertical stacking, vivid colours, and the absence of atmosphere (shading/blending or colours) and shadow, lends itself to depicting an abstract world.[66]

63 Sina Motevalli and Ali Mohammad Nilforoushan, "From Canvas to Reality: Reinterpreting Iranian Miniature Perspective in Product Design through Cognitive Illusion," *Journal of Building and Architecture*, vol. 2 (2025): 2, https://www.academia.edu/24717736/

64 Ibid.

65 Pegah Eidipour, "Persian Miniature Painting," *World History Encyclopedia*, August 24, 2021, https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1811/persian-miniature-painting/.

66 Arthur Upham Pope, *An Introduction to Persian Art Since the Seventh Century A.D.* (London: Peter Davies, 1930), 106-107.



Fig. 1.24 (Right), Miniature by Mir Sayyid ʻAli, Tabriz, *Nighttime in a City*, c. 1540. Image of miniature by Ibolya Horváth, 2021. A traditional Persian miniature painting, possible folio from illustrated manuscript.

Persian miniatures prioritize symbolic, imaginative space over the material realm. It seeks to engage with a "non-physical" space of Islamic sacred art that "is not the creation of man's whims or fancies but possesses an ontological reality of its own."[67] Living beings and the material world are viewed as transitory; therefore, the distinct two-dimensional quality of vertical stacking is important in establishing a mode of consciousness and spatial conception separate from the three-dimensional physical world.[68] Islamic scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr states:

67 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The World of Imagination and the Concept of Space in the Persian Miniature," *Islamic Quarterly*, vol. 13, no. 3 (1969): 130, https://www.academia.edu/24717736.

68 Ibid., 130-131.

> *"[…T]he Persian miniature succeeded in transforming the plane surface of the miniature to a canvas depicting grades of reality, and was able to guide man from the horizon of material existence, and also profane and mundane consciousness, to a higher state of being and of consciousness, an intermediate world with its own space, time, movement, colours and forms, where events occur in a real but not necessarily physical manner, the world which the Muslim philosophers of Persia have called the 'imaginal world' (mundus imaginalis) or the 'alam al-khayal.'"*[69]

Beginning as accompaniments to manuscripts, miniatures evolved into their own art form. Common themes include depictions of royal court life and portrayals of narratives from ancient epics and poetry.[70] Although Persian miniatures were primarily an art form of the royal courts and have no direct religious significance, the permeation of religion into all aspects of human activity in Islam makes them inherently sacred, though perhaps not to the degree of the purely sacred art of Islam, such as mosque architecture.[71]

Another possible contribution to this intermediary state is frame breaking. In some miniatures, elements such as plants, figures, and architectural features extend beyond the painting's ruled lines. By breaking the frame, the artist also breaks the boundary between the painting's internal world and the viewer's external world, mediating between imagined space and existing space.[72]



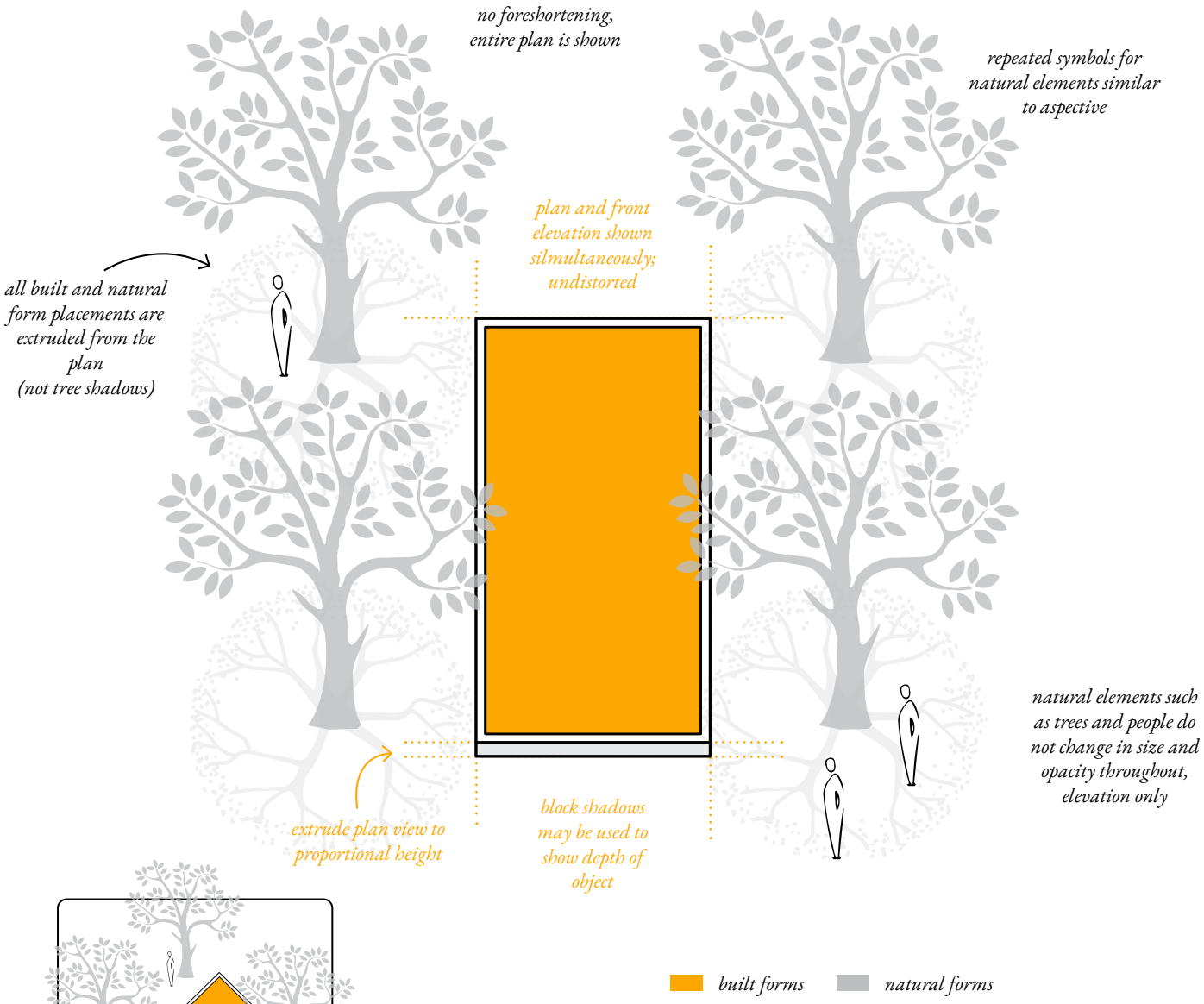
Fig. 1.25 Miniature attributed to Aqa Mirak, *Firdausi and the poets of Ghazna*, c. 1532. Image of miniature by Evgeny Ardaev, 2012. Example of elements breaking out of the frame.

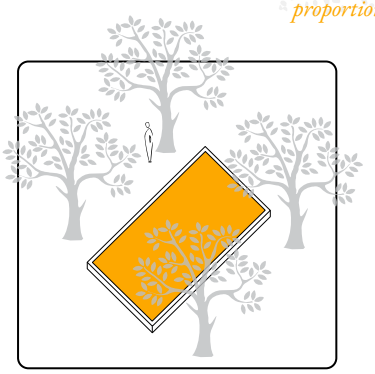
69 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The World of Imagination and the Concept of Space in the Persian Miniature," 131.

70 Pegah Eidipour, "Persian Miniature Painting."

71 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "The World of Imagination and the Concept of Space in the Persian Miniature," 131.

72 Bagher B. Shotorban et al., "Breaking the Frame in Traditional Persian Paintings, a Prelude to Remediation," *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, vol. 21, no. 10 (2022): 1, 16. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/364067107.





alternate diagram if plan was rotated 45 degrees

DIAGRAM: HEJDUK'S AXONOMETRIC DEGREE ZERO

1.5 HEJDUK'S AXONOMETRIC DEGREE ZERO

This representation method is a combination of John Hejduk's axonometric degree zero and OMA architect Alex Wall's Pleasure of Architecture poster. Drawings that resonate with this section include the San Rocco covers by Michele Marchetti and the works of Auguste Merle.

JOHN HEJDUK'S AXONOMETRIC DEGREE ZERO

Hejduk's axonometric degree zero, more broadly known as the 90-degree axonometric, "tip-forward," or drop-back view, is an extrusion of the plan that provides a simultaneous view of the plan and the front elevation.[73] Unlike typical axonometrics that have three visible faces (top with two sides), the axonometric degree zero only shows two (top and front), where both sides are undistorted, while the remaining sides collapse to nothing.

The resulting image may seem somewhat childish or naive in its flatness. Nevertheless, the drawing encapsulates Hejduk's metaphysical speculations on the collapse of space and the compression of time.[74] In the Diamond House drawing, as the plan of the house itself is rotated, the projection would be distorted by nature. Yet an animated tension exists between the flat, two-dimensional frame and the energetic, three-dimensional volumes within. Flatness and depth coexist, revealing spatial complexity.

Fig. 1.26 (Opposite) Diagram by author. Hejduk axonometric degree zero representation diagram.

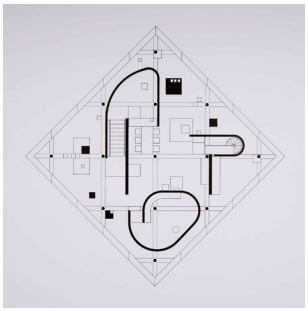


Fig. 1.27 Plan drawing (offset lithogrph print) by John Hejduk, *Project A Diamond House*, 1969. Image from Drawing Matters archive, DMC 2303.a7.

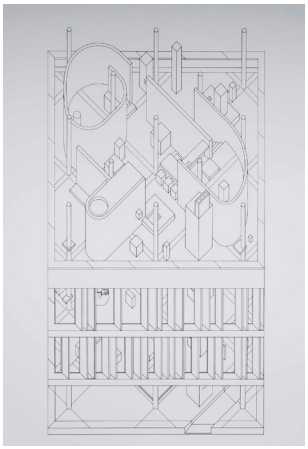


Fig. 1.28 Plan drawing (offset lithogrph print) by John Hejduk, *Project A Diamond House*, 1969. Image from Drawing Matters archive, DMC 2303.a8. An extrusion of the rotated plan, a degree zero axonometric representation.

73 Stan Allen, "John Hejduk's Axonometric Degree Zero," *Drawing Matter*, September 23, 2019, https://drawingmatter.org/john-hejduks-axonometric-degree-zero/.

74 Ibid.

ALEX WALL'S PARC DE LA VILLETTE POSTER

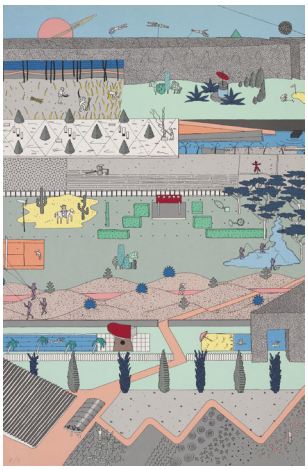


Fig. 1.29 Poster by Alex Wall, Office for the Metropolitan Architecture (OMA), *The Pleasure of Architecture*, 1983. Image by Alvin Boyarsky. Poster for the Parc de la Villette competition 1982-1983.

In an interview, Wall also describes how the tip-up projections in his Parc de la Villette poster were "inaccurate" or "a lot of nonsense" to some.[75] However, like Hejduk's axonometric degree zero, Wall's chosen form of spatial expression served a purpose. In the drawing, there is no foreshortening or receding horizon; the entire plan is shown, keeping faithful to the central idea of the project: the experience of crossing from one strand of activity to the next.[76] It resembles a form of representation before perspective, yet it supports the project's core idea of borders, in which "all the temporal episodes of a story are shown together."[77]

Both drawings are playful and emblematic, pulling away from realism and technicality to focus on content and delivery. The image becomes more schematic, making the information of the built form immediately accessible to the viewer.[78]

The diagram combines spatial techniques derived from these two methods of representation. The overall landscape and built forms follow Hejduk's axonometric degree zero, while natural elements, such as trees and people, are shown only in elevation. They maintain a uniform scale throughout the drawing, depicting a different, more abstract and symbolic form of continuity compared to the "moving viewpoint perspective" in traditional Chinese painting. Spatial depth is communicated through the placement of consistently scaled objects across a continuous landscape and through block colouring and shading on the different faces of the objects.

---

75 Alex Wall, "OMA Conversations: Foreplay," interview by Richard Hall, *Drawing Matter*, November 22, 2021, https://drawingmatter.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/DM_RH_AW001_C24-1.pdf.

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.

78 Stan Allen, "John Hejduk's Axonometric Degree Zero."

This drawing method is a modern example of how Far Eastern philosophical thinking and ways of seeing can be combined with Western drawing conventions. Flatness and depth coexist. Objects deviate from the rules of perspective while keeping both diagrammatic and compositional significance. The drawing illustrates how the built form can simultaneously be an object and part of a complete, coherent system. We can also notice subtle hints of the "Viewing the Small from the Large" method of spatial reasoning, in which elements are viewed as a whole, mentally reconstructed, and placed in a scenic, walkable composition.

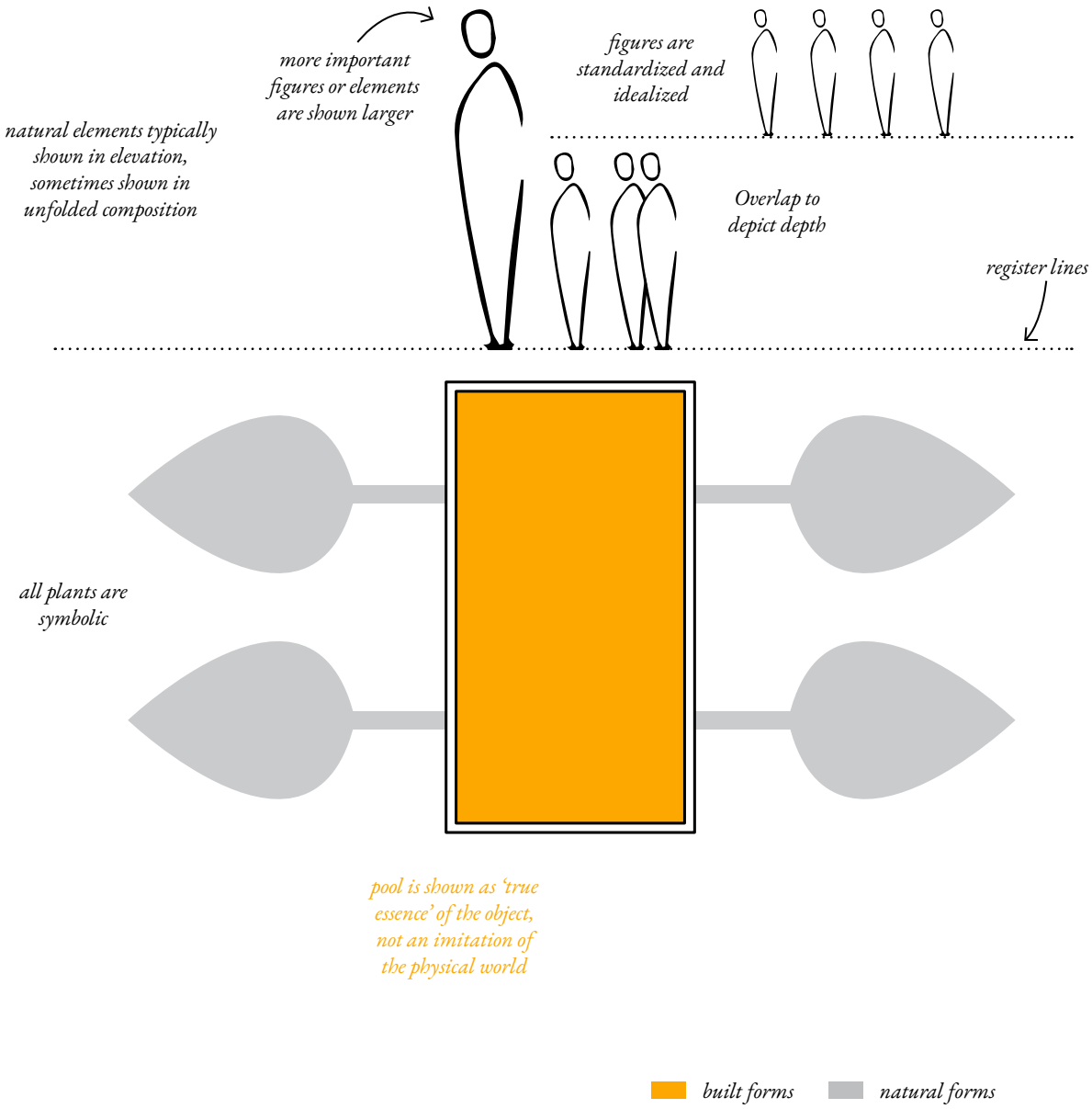


DIAGRAM: ASPECTIVE

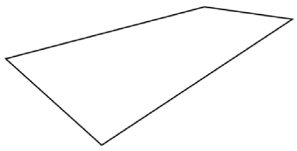
1.6 ASPECTIVE

Non-perspective drawing in ancient Egyptian art falls under the term "aspective" or "aperspective," a designation coined by Egyptologist Emma Brunner-Traut, who also saw this way of representation as a specific, culture-based process of thinking and seeing.[79] Artwork served a sacred purpose in Egyptian culture, as it was predominantly featured in places of worship (i.e., temples and tombs).[80] It was never intended to imitate the physical world; rather, it was meant to represent the eternal world of the afterlife.[81] Worldly appearances are discarded to invoke the eternal, an invisible aspect. The perspectival image, by contrast, imitates the material world and, in its representation, loses its true eternal essence. [82]

Aspective is a conglomeration of "separate" parts. Each object, element, or part of an object is portrayed in its most recognizable form and assembled to create a unified whole.[83] This is exemplified in the oscillation between frontal and in-profile depictions in the human figure. Human figures are also standardized with an ideal set of bodily proportions, often without distinctive features. Typical figures are categorized by gender, and some are embellished with additional detail depending on their role.[84]

Fig. 1.30 (Opposite) Diagram by author. Aspective representation diagram.

Fig. 1.31 (Below) Diagram by author. Perspectival representation of a rectangle imitates the real world, losing its true eternal essence. It is not longer an accurate representation of what a rectangle is.



Perspective Representation



Aspective Representation

79 Rune Nyord, "Vision and Conceptualization in Ancient Egyptian Art," in *Sensuous Cognition: Explorations into Human Sentience: Imagination, (E)motion and Perception*, eds. Rosario Cabellero and Javier E. Diaz Vera (Gottingen: De Gruyter Mouton, 2013), 142.

80 Massimo Scolari, *Oblique Drawing: A History of the Anti-Perspective*, 56; Rune Nyord, "Vision and Conceptualization in Ancient Egyptian Art," 162.

81 Massimo Scolari, *Oblique Drawing: A History of the Anti-Perspective*, 50.

82 Ibid., 56.

83 Rune Nyord, "Vision and Conceptualization in Ancient Egyptian Art," 137.

84 Ibid., 138-139.

Parallel lines, known as registers, organize scenes and serve as ground lines for figures in a desolate, uniformly coloured background.[85] Location and scale reflect conceptual metaphors and convey status: the higher up or larger the figure or element, the higher the status.[86] Meanwhile, overlapping figures and elements convey depth.

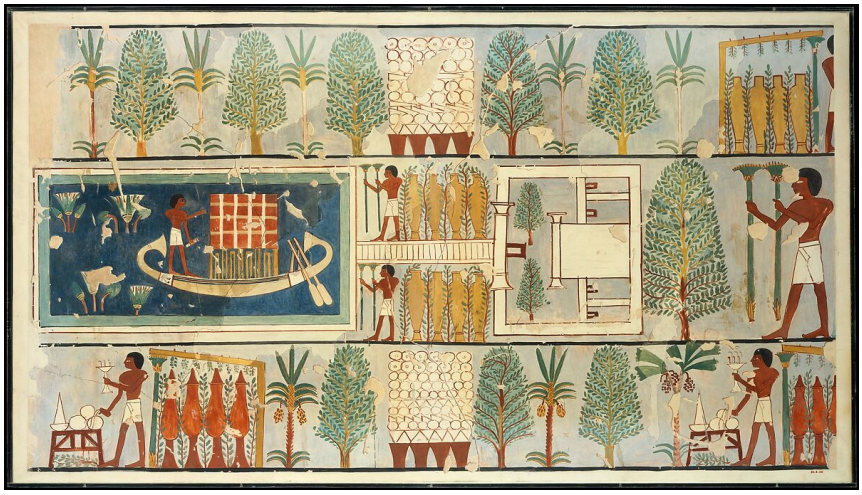


Fig. 1.32 (Right) Copy by Charles K. Wilkinson, *Funeral Ritual in a Garden, Tomb of Nakhtmin*, 1921. A section of wall painting in the tomb of Nakhtmin, in western Thebes original ca. 1479–1425 BCE. The scene depicts a garden surrounding a building with a pool in front.



Fig. 1.33 Fragment of a tomb painting, original artist unknown, *Nebamun's Garden,* c. 1350 BC, 18th Dynasty. Image from The British Museum.

In the diagram, which alludes to a garden scene, objects are shown in frontal view. The true essence of the pool is rectangular, while the trees, as natural elements, unfold on all sides to illustrate orientation (See also Figure 1.33). Similar to pre-Renaissance medieval art, aspective art uses symbolic significance; scale and location establish hierarchy. Key figures are shown larger, as their true essence is greater than their physical form.

It is also crucial to note the significance of the garden scene. Gardens in ancient Egypt emulate a mythological landscape and the world of the afterlife.[87] Each element holds

85 Rune Nyord, "Vision and Conceptualization in Ancient Egyptian Art," 139.

86 Ibid., 139, 153.

87 Alix Wilkinson, "Symbolism and Design in Ancient Egyptian Gardens," *Garden History*, vol.22, no. 1 (1994): 2, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1586999.

symbolic meaning. The waters of the central pool mirror the primordial waters that covered the earth in the beginning of time.[88] Plants all hold individual symbolism (e.g., waterlilies are associated with creation and rebirth through their daily cycle of opening to sunlight and closing at night, a reminder of how the sun god had emerged from the primordial waterlily).[89]

Aspective, analogous to other non-perspectives, embodies within it the conceptualization of the object, scene, or drawing in question. The drawing is able to inform the viewer about the artist's psychological processes as they determine the boundaries between parts, what is significant, and what is less so.

88 Alix Wilkinson, "Symbolism and Design in Ancient Egyptian Gardens," 2-3.

89 Ibid.



DIAGRAM:
WORDS & CHARACTERS

1.7 WORDS & CHARACTERS

The remaining method of representation is not a non-perspective; however, I would like to briefly touch on its significance as a form of visual spatial thinking.

In traditional Chinese handscrolls, inscriptions and colophons are often present, left by individuals throughout history. These may include poetry composed by the artist or others, descriptions of the circumstances during its creation, or written commentary left on additional sheets of paper or silk by close companions, viewers or collectors.[90] Commentary may address the painting's quality, include written or sketched biographies of the artist, describe the art or historical context of its creation, or engage with previous colophons.[91] The scroll and colophons may also feature a collection of "signatures" in the form of personal seals (red stamped marks bearing the owner's name). The handscroll becomes a temporal collage of continuous dialogue between the artist, companions, poets, collectors, and the past, present, and future viewers.

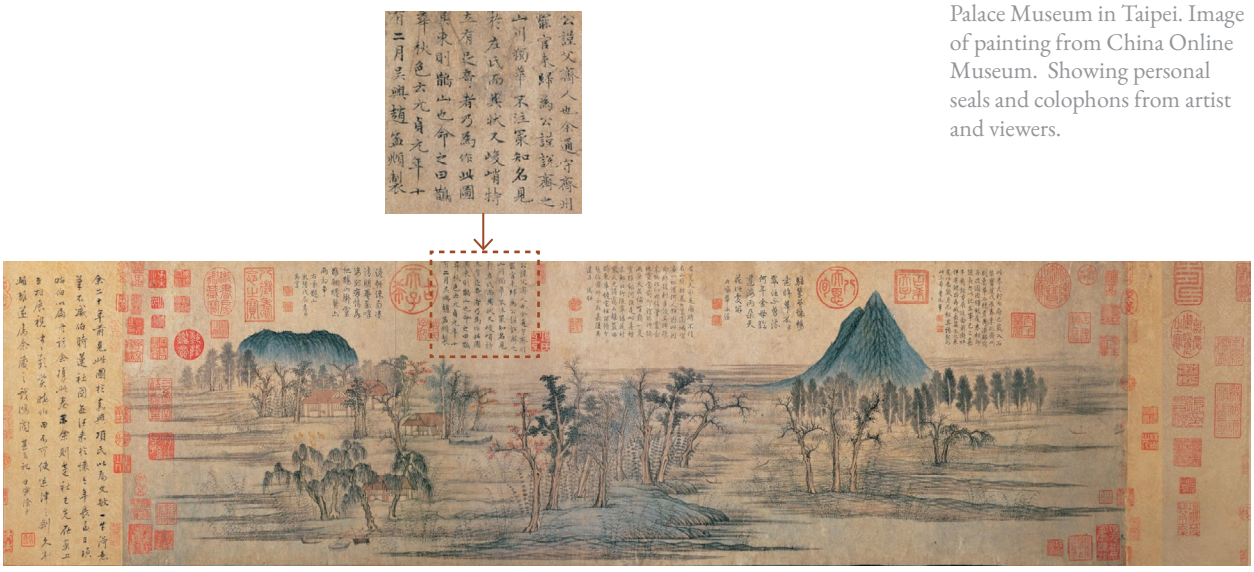


Fig. 1.34 (Opposite) Diagram by author. Words and characters representation diagram.

Fig. 1.35 (Top) Close-up detail of original handscroll painting by Zhao Mengfu [赵孟頫], *Autumn Colors on the Que and Hua Mountains* [鹊华秋色图], c. 1295, housed in National Palace Museum in Taipei. Image of painting from China Online Museum. Written script on the scroll notes the painting is for a close friend.

Fig. 1.36 (Bottom) Handscroll painting by Zhao Mengfu [赵孟頫], *Autumn Colors on the Que and Hua Mountains* [鹊华秋色图], c. 1295, housed in National Palace Museum in Taipei. Image of painting from China Online Museum. Showing personal seals and colophons from artist and viewers.

90 Dawn Delbanco, "Chinese Handscrolls," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art,* April 1, 2008, https://www.metmuseum.org/essays/chinese-handscrolls.

91 Ibid.

Words and characters in the realm of architecture and drawing are often secondary features or accompaniments. Yet they are also essential for establishing ideas in diagrams, technical drawings, labels, notes, etc.

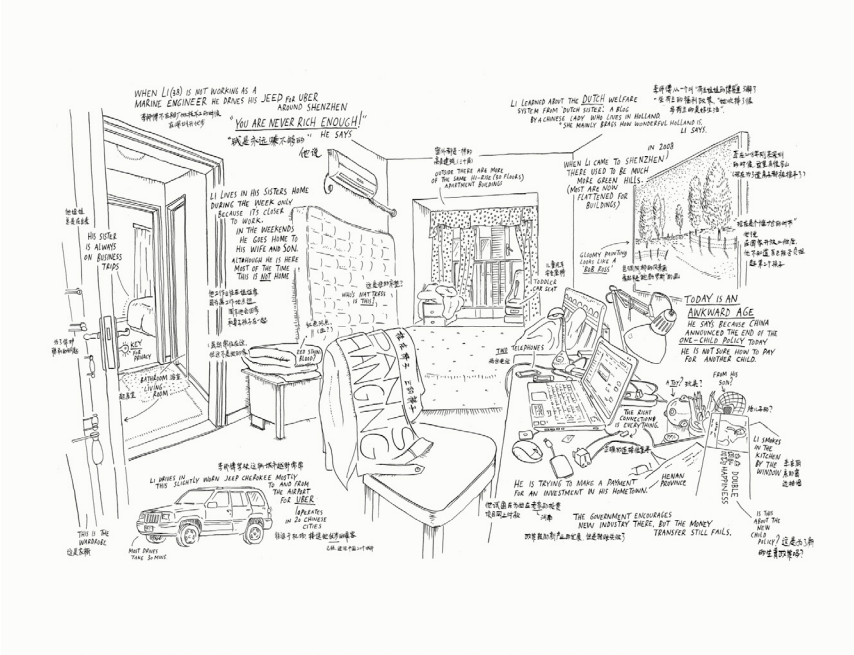


Fig. 1.37 (Right) Drawing by Jan Rothuizen, *Taxi Driver Shenzhen*, 2015. Drawing of a taxi driver's (Li's) home in Shenzhen. Written portions are both in English and Mandarin, showing nuances hidden in translation between languages (e.g. "钱是永远赚不够的。" Another layer of meaning may be about the cost of living, where "one can never earn enough money (to live comfortably)."

The power of words as a visual and spatial technique is also explored in contemporary drawings, such as the written mappings of Jan Rothuizen. His sensitive, playful hand-drawn and handwritten maps feature writing as a core medium for experiential and spatial storytelling. The drawings are rich, immersive documentations of everyday life. Rothuizen blends observations, conversations, inferences, and explanations through a mixture of words, symbols, and sketches. Written words change in font, style, size, language, and sometimes colour, emphasizing the relationships among elements, their locations, and the space they occupy.

02 FRAGMENTATION OF CHINESE MYTHOLOGY

The term "mythology" or 神话 (shenhua) did not exist in ancient China.[92] The study and definition of mythology are Western concepts. The study of Chinese mythology through this foreign theoretical framework was adopted in the early 20th century, during the diffusion of Western learning in China.[93] The strong influence of the Western standpoint on the study of mythology as a cultural product of antiquity and distant ancestors shapes how Chinese scholars approach Chinese mythology. As a result, the Chinese mythological canon often draws on Han dynasty sources. Examples include Pangu Creates Heaven and Earth [盘古开天], Nüwa Mends Sky [女娲补天], and Houyi and the Ten Suns [后羿射日].[94]

Unlike other civilizations, such as ancient Greece, Egypt, and India, there is no systematic account of Chinese myth. Instead, story fragments are scattered throughout classical texts, historical records, cultural rituals, and oral traditions.[95]

---

92 Ke Yuan, 中国古代神话 [*Ancient Chinese Mythology*] (Shanghai: 华东师范大学出版社 [East China Normal University Press], 2017), 1.

93 Yuqing Liu, "A New Model in the Study of Chinese Mythology," trans. Casey Lee, *Journal of Chinese Humanities* 3 (2017): 2, https://brill.com/view/journals/joch/3/1/article-p1_1.xml.

94 Ibid.

95 Ke Yuan, 中国古代神话 [*Ancient Chinese Mythology*], 4-5.

Different primordial beings and their tales surfaced at various times in history. Their appearances sometimes fell outside the "chronological" order suggested by Chinese creation myths, such as the creation god Pangu appearing after the mother goddess of humanity, Nüwa. .

Yuan Ke [袁珂], a prominent scholar of Chinese mythology, was the first to facilitate the systematic development of Chinese mythology. Yuan Ke scrutinized and consolidated scattered fragments from thousands of ancient sources into an accessible, cohesive, and chronological structure of myth. These composite narratives are recorded in his book *Ancient Chinese Mythology* [中国古代神话] and its translation, *Dragons and Dynasties: An Introduction to Chinese Mythology*.

As native theoretical frameworks for Chinese mythology are scarce, Yuan Ke cites Maxim Gorky, who viewed mythology as more than pure imagination, but as "realistic" artistic expressions of ancient labour, struggle, and knowledge.[96] Gorky believed that these fantastic tales were tools for understanding humanity's struggle against nature and reflections on emerging technological and cultural capacities. Myths are not only explanations for the wonders of natural [97]phenomena. According to Yuan Ke, Chinese primordial beings, deities, and folk heroes are revered as labour heroes for their ability to conquer nature and improve human life.

> "他们是神，可也是人，正如高尔基所说，他们是
> '莫种手艺的能手，人们的教师和同事。'"
>
> - 袁珂，中国古代神话 [98]

> *"They are gods, but also human; as Gorky states, they are 'masters of a certain craft, the people's teachers and colleagues.'"*
>
> Yuan Ke, *Ancient Chinese Mythology* [99]

96 Ke Yuan, 中国古代神话 [*Ancient Chinese Mythology*], 1-2.

97 Ibid.

98 Ibid., 2.

99 Ibid.

2.1 FRAGMENTED, HISTORICIZED, CURATED



Fig. 2.1 Photograph by unknown author, Academy of Chinese Studies, 2023. *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* [山海经], Ming dynasty copy.

One theory for the fragmentation of Chinese mythology is the transformation of myths into history during the early Qin and Han periods. Yuan Ke attributes this rethinking of myth largely to Confucianism, in which Confucian scholars edited, anthropomorphized gods and creatures, and provided rationalized interpretations of the legends to fit their doctrine.[100] These heavily modified and "distorted" narratives were recorded in historical documents and led to the gradual loss and disappearance of ancient Chinese myth.[101] Fortunately, fragments of myth are still preserved in the works of poets and philosophers.

Fragments can also be found in the only extant work of ancient Chinese myth, The Classic of Mountains and Seas [山海经 - *shanhaijing*], a classical text that compiles mythic geographies, as well as beasts, spirits, and deities that reside within.[102] The book also mentions divination methods, leading some to speculate it might have been a prayer book for shamans.[103] Although *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* is a treasure trove of mythical material, it is difficult to read, consisting mainly of illustrations and scattered, often incomprehensible supplementary text.

Furthermore, the kaleidoscopic nature of Chinese myth is also a result of the constant modification and transformation of mythical figures and narratives. Story elements from numerous local ethnic groups in ancient China, as well as foreign influences, absorbed and contradicted one another over thousands of years.[104] The same deity can evolve over time, with each variant having a completely different appearance, identity, and narrative purpose.

---

100 Ke Yuan, 中国古代神话 [*Ancient Chinese Mythology*], 5.

101 Ibid.

102 Ibid., 7.

103 Ibid., 8.

104 Ibid., 10.

Another noteworthy obstacle is distinguishing between mythology and superstition [迷信 - *mixin*]. Both stem from humanity's belief in supernatural forces but carry different meanings. Yuan Ke cites literary theorist Zhou Yang, who argues that the difference lies in opposing attitudes toward fate.[105] While myth depicts rebellion and the unwillingness to submit to fate, superstition promotes fatalism and karma, in which people believe they must bow to a predetermined destiny that cannot be altered[106] Myth encourages one to rebel against a supposed destiny and to decide one's own fate, while superstition cultivates submission and highlights humanity's helplessness before the gods.

This method is relatively straightforward, yet it is rarely practical for analyzing Chinese myth. Countless myths embody aspects of superstition, making it difficult to completely separate them from the myth without losing nuance.[107] One must consider the historical and societal context as well as narrative significance. Yuan Ke stresses that separating mythology from superstition is a delicate matter and should be handled cautiously.

Mythology is, ultimately, a fluid social phenomenon, constantly evolving and adapting to shifting societal and cultural values. Myth is not history, but it may reflect how history morphs and changes, generation after generation.[108] Myth often compresses hundreds, thousands of years of human wisdom, labour, and change into a concentrated instant of "miracle."

105 Ke Yuan, 中国古代神话 [*Ancient Chinese Mythology*], 11.

106 Ibid., 12.

107 Ibid.

108 Ibid., 14.

"旧有的神话在发展，在演变，新的神话也在随着历史的进展在不断的产生。直到今天，旧的神话没有消失，新的神话还在产生。"

- 袁珂，中国神话史 [109]

"Old myths develop and evolve; new myths too are constantly emerging as history progresses. Even today, old myths have not disappeared, and new myths continue to be created."

- Yuan Ke, *History of Chinese Myth* [110]

109 Ke Yuan, 中国神话史 [History of Chinese Myth] (Shanghai: 北京联合出版社公司 [Beijing United Publishing], 2015), 1.

110 Ibid.

2.2 PRIMORDIAL CHINESE MYTHS

The following is a selection of nine Chinese origin myths to serve as inspiration for the final drawing exercise. These stories were chosen for their notoriety and influence in Chinese culture. It is important to note that these myths are broadly representative of the Han Chinese ethnic group and do not include specific mythologies from ethnic minorities within China; thus, they are not a complete depiction of all primordial Chinese mythology.

The myths are organized into three sections, corresponding to the three thematic segments within the final scroll drawing:

CREATIONS SERIES

1. ***Pangu Creates the World*** [盘古开天辟地]
   The first being, the primordial giant Pangu creates the world from the initial chaos. He emerges from a cosmic egg and creates a creates a space in between the sky and earth for life to flourish.

2. ***Nüwa Creates Humanity*** [女娲造人]
   The birth of humanity and the story of the mother goddess Nüwa molding man out of mud.

3. ***Nüwa Mends the Sky*** [女娲补天]
   A pillar of heaven is broken during a divine battle, wrecking havoc on Earth. Nüwa sacrifices herself to save her children by patching the sky with a mixture of five different coloured stones.

DIVINE LESSONS SERIES

4. ***Suiren and the First Fire*** [燧人氏钻木取火]
   The first fire made by humanity's own hands, leading to the first spark of civilization.

5. ***Fuxi's Eye of Knowledge*** [伏羲八卦]
   Fuxi, brother and husband to Nüwa, taught humanity the ways of life and the universe. He gave humanity cognition and thought.

6. ***Shennong and Agriculture*** [神农氏]
   The god of agriculture who, along with Fuxi, taught humanity how to cultivate nature through agriculture and farming. Shennong is also known for testing thousands of herbs on himself before teaching humanity what herbs are safe to use and how to use them.

CELESTIAL BODIES SERIES

7. ***Houyi and the Ten Suns*** [后羿射日]
   Explanation myth for the change in knowledge from a new sun each day to a single sun that rotates around the world.

8. ***Chang'e and the Moon*** [嫦娥奔月]
   Chang'e, the wife of Houyi, drinks an elixir of immortality and ascends to the moon and becomes the goddess of the moon.

9. ***The World Beyond*** [山海之间]
   A speculative map of the mythical world that humanity dwells within. The deep seas to the East, the desolate desert to the West, the scorching fires of the South, the frozen mountains to the North, and humanity at the centre of the world.



03 MEANDERING EYES

"Changing the way of seeing, and therefore the way of representing, meant changing the mode of thinking[...]"

- Massimo Scolari, *Oblique Drawing* [111]

3.1 FINAL SPECULATIVE DRAWING EXERCISE

In conclusion to this research, the final speculative drawing is a speculative handscroll, depicting an experiential journey through a museum of fantastical allusions to primordial Chinese myths.

Artifacts across millennia are displayed in a continuous mythical landscape, including archaeological finds, urban artifacts, statues, poetry, cultural art forms, architecture, modern rituals and celebrations. These artifacts across time reinforce the presence of myth and its ability to connect people between the past, present, and future.

In the drawing, I explore ways to employ and combine the techniques of spatial construction in the previously covered non-perspectives into a visual collage. Similar to the principles of the aspective view, I apply different representation methods to each artifact, the landscape, and the overall composition to

Fig. 3.0.1 (Opposite) Photograph and drawing by author. Experiment progress sketch of the final drawing.

111 Massimo Scolari, Oblique Drawing: A History of the Anti-Perspective, 348.

determine the optimal way to portray each element based on its part in a unified, mythical narrative. As a result, some artifacts may experience a hybrid of these representation types.

The drawing exercise is a shift in modes of visual representation as it is a shift in spatial thinking and seeing.

It is important to note that the drawing is only loosely inspired by the chosen Chinese origin myths and is not a direct visual retelling or an "accurate" narrative portrayal. Each segment showcases elements and details from various versions of the myths.[112]

In some segments, key figures, story components, and events are preserved and alluded to through selected artifacts. Other portions, such as Segment 01 and Segment 08, discard these elements to bridge other segments. These instances often reflect a preference for composition over narrative. Just as the drawing takes shape as a layered, experimental collage, the story fragments that compose the mythical narrative are assembled from diverse sources, as well as my own interpretations, memories, and imaginings.

The following is the culminating thesis scroll drawing, accompanied by progress work, diagrams, and explanations that address the thought process behind the content, format, and techniques.

112 The versions of the myths that are referenced in the drawing are a combination of the tales in Yuan Ke's *Myths of Ancient China* and *Collection of Chinese Mythological Stories*, the *China* documentary, and my own memory from stories told to me in my childhood.

DRAWING MEDIUM: *HAND-DRAWN DIGITAL*

The initial sketch was partially hand-drawn both traditionally on trace paper and digitally on an iPad to develop the overall composition. Then, the final handscroll was digitally hand-drawn on the iPad using Procreate.

Due to the size of the drawing (200in x 20in) and the constraints of Procreate, the drawing was split into six separate drawing files during its conception to ensure enough layers were available. Each segment was then compiled in InDesign to create the final handscroll.

Fig. 3.0.2 (Next page, top) Drawing by author. Rough sketch of the final handscroll, some areas are hand-drawn on trace paper, others are hand-drawn on tablet.

Fig. 3.0.3 (Next page, middle) Drawing by author. Final handscroll drawing, linework only, digitally hand-drawn on tablet.

Fig. 3.0.4 (Next page, bottom) Drawing by author. Final handscroll drawing, coloured, digitally hand-drawn on tablet.

CELESTIAL BODIES SERIES

9. The World Beyond
[山海之间]

8. Chang'e and the Moon
[嫦娥奔月]

7. Houyi and the Ten Suns
[后羿射日]

DIVINE LESSONS SERIES

6. Shennong & Agriculture
[神农氏]

5. Fuxi's Eye of Knowledge
[伏羲八卦]

4. Suiren and the First Fire
[燧人氏钻木取火]

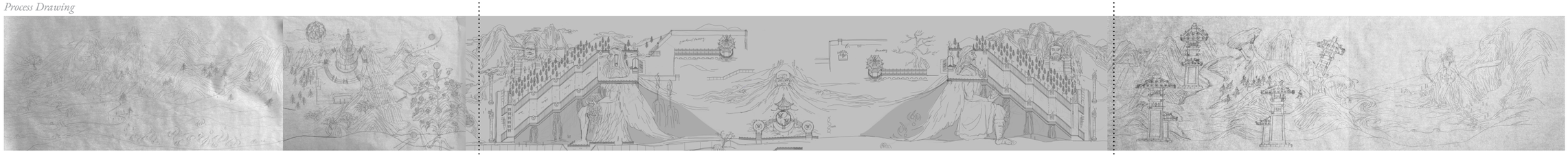
CREATIONS SERIES

3. Nüwa Mends the Sky
[女娲补天]

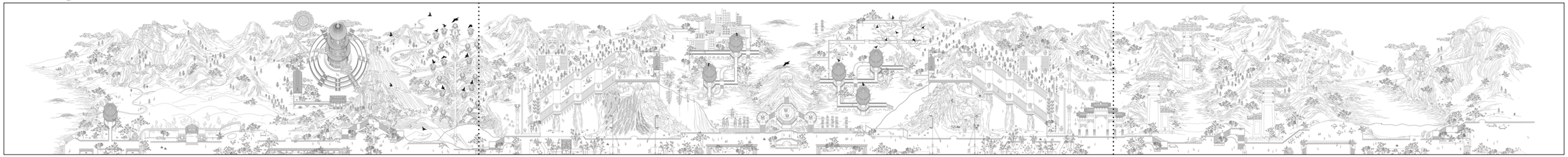
2. Nüwa Creates Humanity
[女娲造人]

1. Pangu Creates the World
[盘古开天辟地]

Process Drawing



Final Drawing (Linework)



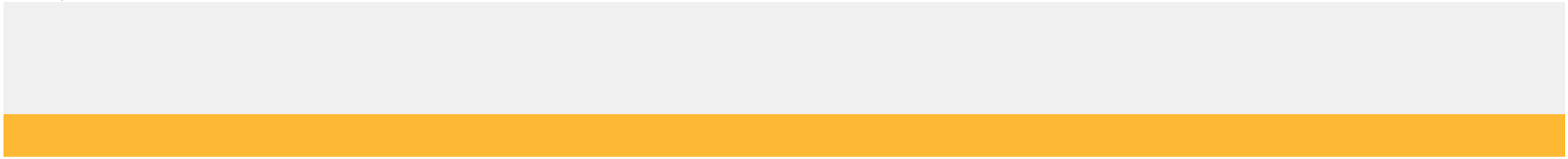
Final Drawing (Coloured)



Final Drawing (Coloured)



Content Diagram



FINAL DRAWING: *GENERAL ELEMENTS*

Fig. 3.0.5 (Previous page, top) Drawing by author. Final handscroll drawing, coloured, digitally hand-drawn on tablet.

Fig. 3.0.6 (Previous page, bottom) Diagram by author. Diagram of how the overall content of the final drawing is displayed.

The overall composition of the final drawing is split into two areas (See Figure 3.0.6). The top area is the "museum display," depicting a mythical landscape where artifacts and elements related to the origin myths are on display in a sprawling garden. The remaining area along the bottom of the scroll is the "museum visitor's walkway," where the museum's imaginary audience can travel as they observe the living display. The walkway features garden elements, covered and open seating, viewing platforms, swings, bridges, waterways, performance platforms, and resting areas. Entry points into the landscape are also scattered throughout the scroll, allowing the imaginary audience to wander into the mythical scenes.

A combination of vertical stacking, "moving viewpoint perspective," and Hejduk's degree zero axonometric creates a sense of distance and depth from the walkway to the landscape beyond. Natural elements such as people (visitors), trees, and plants are represented in elevation. These natural elements stay at the same scale, and the same illustration is repeated throughout to ensure continuity and portray a sense of time and movement.

As opposed to the varied and tapered line work in the brushstrokes of traditional painting, the line work in the drawing is uniform throughout, except in select areas where a heavier line weight is used for cross-sectional cut lines. Although varied lines are expressive, thicker areas may suggest the illusion of shadows, emphasizing the object's presence and its distance from the viewer. The line weights in the drawing are closer to a technical drawing, though there is no visual hierarchy to denote depth or distance. Instead, depth is conveyed through overlapping elements and the density of contour lines. The lack of a single point of visual emphasis encourages the viewer's eyes to wander across the page.

Moreover, hand-drawn, uniform lines create another layer of dissonance between digital and traditional illustration. The pen pressure applied in traditional and digital hand-drawing fluctuates naturally to match our visual perception. The digital brush was customized so that the stabilizer and pen pressure were set to zero.

Colours are used sparingly to avoid overt emphasis on objects and artifacts again. Despite there being sources of light (suns and fires) within the drawing, there is no shading or shadows. Rather, a light wash of white, red, and warm grey is applied to select areas to create visual interest. A seamless silk texture is applied to the background to mimic the material of traditional handscrolls. Additionally, a version of the drawing with line work only on a white background was considered for the final handscroll for its visual consistency, encouraging the viewer to look closely to separate the details (See Fig. 3.0.3).

HANDSCROLL INSPIRATIONS

The final drawing is also greatly influenced by two traditional handscrolls from the late Ming and early Qing dynasty:

1. *Peach Assembly of Immortals* [蟠桃仙会卷], attributed to Qiu Ying [仇英], Ming dynasty.

2. *Imitation of Qiu Ying's "Spring Dawn in the Han Palace"* [仿仇英汉宫春晓图] by Ding Guanpeng [丁观鹏], Qing dynasty.

Although both handscrolls are reworked imitations of original paintings by Ming Dynasty painter Qiu Ying, their status as fake copies does not diminish their artistic value. The handscrolls are referenced to understand how natural elements may be contoured and placed on the canvas, how people and architecture are embedded into the landscape, and how depth and distance are conveyed in a long handscroll format.

The handscrolls were chosen for their composition and narrative themes. Handscroll 1, Peach Assembly of Immortals, inspired the mythical landscape at the top portion of the final drawing. The composition layers mythological figures and architectural structures within a sprawling natural landscape. Handscroll 2 was selected for its portrayal of palace gardens, influencing the makeup of the visitor's walkway at the bottom portion of the final drawing.



Fig. 3.0.7 (Bottom) Handscroll painting attributed to Qiu Ying [仇英], *Peach Assembly of Immortals* [蟠桃仙会卷], Ming dynasty. Images of handscroll from National Palace Museum.

Fig. 3.0.7a, Fig. 3.0.7b, Fig. 3.0.7c (Top Left, Top Centre, Top Right) Close-up details of the handscroll by author. Images of handscroll from National Palace Museum.



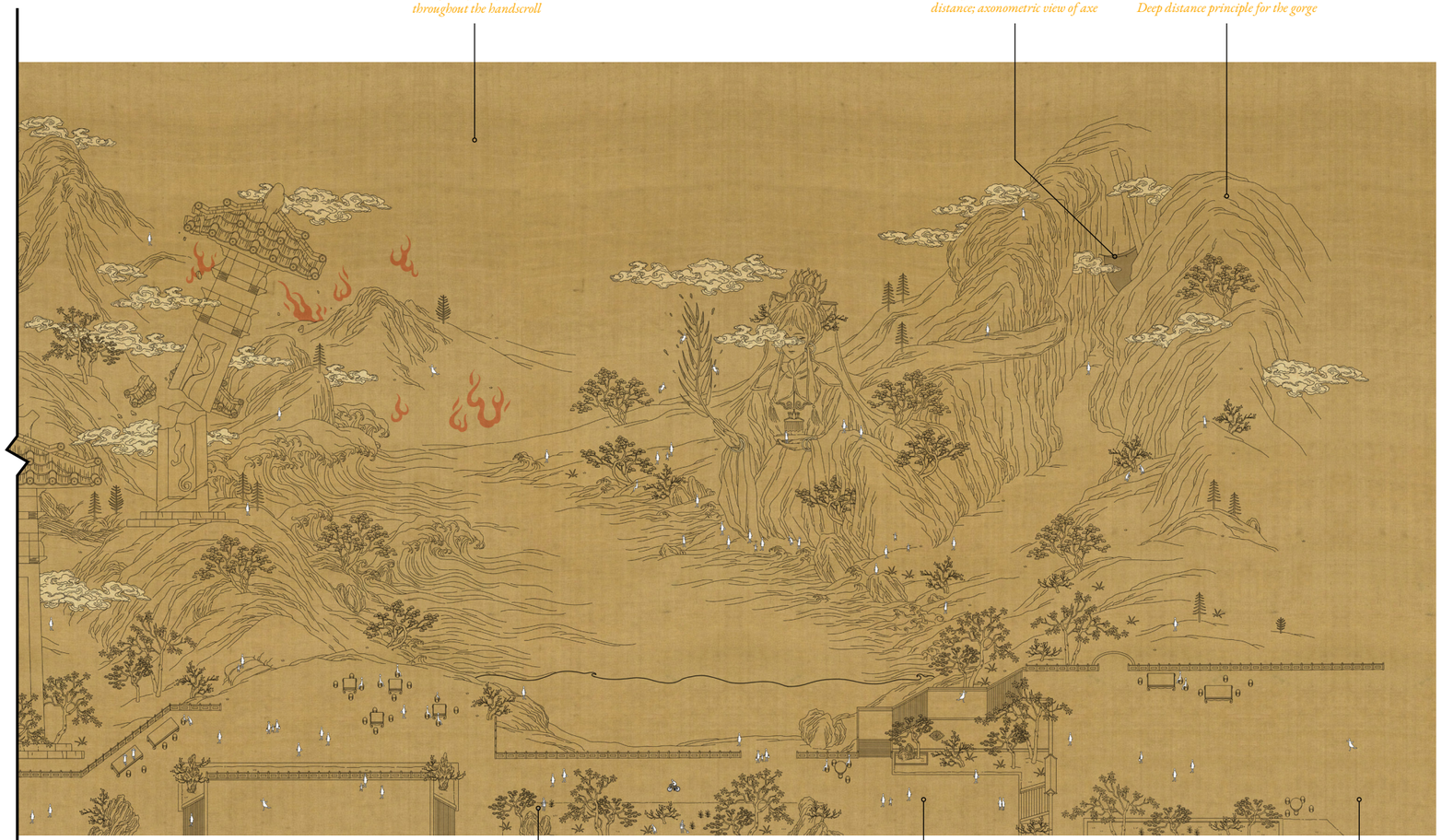
Fig. 3.0.8 (Bottom) Handscroll painting by Ding Guanpeng [丁观鹏], *Imitation of Qiu Ying's "Spring Dawn in the Han Palace"* [仿仇英汉宫春晓图], Qing dynasty. Images of handscroll from National Palace Museum.

Fig. 3.0.8a, Fig. 3.0.8b, Fig. 3.0.8c (Top Left, Top Centre, Top Right) Close-up details of the handscroll by author. Images of handscroll from National Palace Museum.

SECTION 1 - CREATIONS SERIES



Fig. 3.1.1 Drawing by author. Enlarged image of the first section of the handscroll, the "Creations Series."



SEGMENT 01
Pangu Creates the World
[盘古开天辟地]

Drawing, Artifacts & Mythical Inspirations

DRAWING INTENTIONS

The drawing begins with a "fade-in," where the contour lines of the natural landscape and the visitor's walkway slowly increase in density toward the right. Atmospheric perspective and an intended blank are created through a lack of line work and the silk-textured background. The imagined landscape gradually emerges from the mists beyond the canvas.

The first drawing segment does not explicitly feature the creation myth of Pangu; rather, it alludes to the aftermath of Pangu's labour, where life can flourish in the space he created between the sky and the earth. His presence is implied through the large gorge on the far right. The split within the landscape symbolizes the two halves of the cosmic egg. A giant axe is partially hidden behind the steep mountains. The layering of the gorge and the axe uses the deep distance principle to express depth within the steep-sided walls.

MYTH SUMMARY

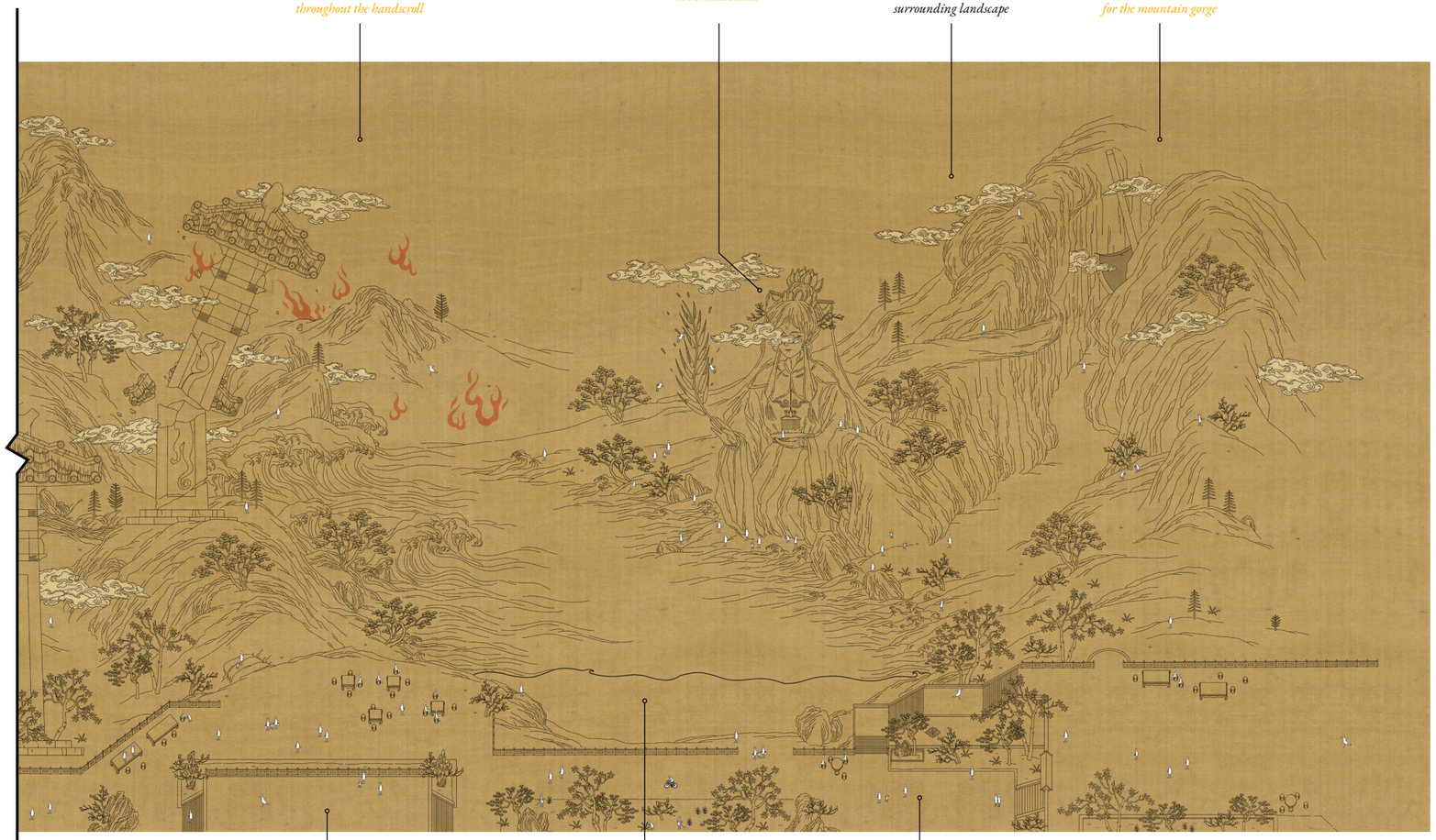
The universe began as formless chaos within a massive cosmic egg. Inside the egg, the giant Pangu slumbered and grew for 18,000 years. When he woke, Pangu saw only darkness around him. In frustration, he grabbed the large axe beside him and broke the shell open with a mighty swing. The lighter, purer elements floated upwards and became the sky (yang) while the heavier elements sank down and became the earth (yin).

To prevent the two elements from merging back together, Pangu stood between them, pushing the sky up with his head and the earth down with his feet. Pangu continued to act as a living pillar for another 18,000 years without rest, growing taller and taller. Exhausted by his laborious task, Pangu collapsed. Upon his passing, Pangu's limbs became the mountains, his blood became the rivers and oceans, his breath became the wind and clouds, his voice became the rumble of thunder, his veins and nerves became pathways, his muscles became the fields, and his hair became the trees and fields. In later versions of the myth, Pangu's eyes became the sun and the moon.[1]

1 Ke Yuan, 中国古代神话 [*Myths of Ancient China*] (Shanghai: 华东师范大学出版社 [East China Normal University Press], 2017), 20-22.

SEGMENT 01: LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 3.1.2 (Left) Drawing by author. Drawing Segment 01, an enlarged segment of the final handscroll, loosely inspired by the creation myth Pangu Creates the World.



SEGMENT 02
Nüwa Creates Humanity
[女娲造人]

Drawing, Artifacts & Mythical Inspirations

DRAWING INTENTIONS

The second drawing segment features a tall kneeling figure by a wide river. Behind the figure is a large gorge from the previous segment, depicting the split terrain of the newly formed earth shaped by Pangu's divine axe.

The figure is portrayed in modern Chinese opera costuming, referencing the mother goddess Nüwa. The hem of her skirts, the sleeves of her robes, and the veil of her headpiece melt into the surrounding landscape. Her serpent-like tail wraps around and fuses with the walls of the gorge behind her, alluding to her emergence into the newly created world. Hierarchical scaling and the high distance principle are used in tandem to emphasize the majesty of the statue as a key figure in the narrative. The head of the statue is surrounded and obscured by clouds and mist, conveying depth and symbolizing that Nuwa was a link between humanity and the divine.

Nüwa holds a rattan cord caked in mud in her hand. Around her, mud specks are flung, morphing into humans. Beside her on the riverbank are the first people moulded by her hands.

MYTH SUMMARY

The first female being (and goddess) Nüwa, felt alone in the newly formed world and yearned for companionship. One day, as she knelt by the Yellow River, she saw her own reflection in the waters and realized why she was so lonely.

Nüwa dug up a handful of yellow clay from the riverbank and began to mould a small mud figure in her own image. She then breathed life into the figure, and the first human came to be.

After the first few humans were shaped, the goddess Nüwa realized how exhausting it was to fill the vast land. To hasten the process, Nüwa dipped a rattan cord in the riverbank and flung droplets of mud across the land. Each mud speck transformed into a person, and Nüwa brought them to life by filling them with her divine essence. Nüwa then split them into men and women. She showed them how to reproduce naturally and create the next generation. This is the first lesson humanity learned from Nüwa, which would evolve from skill to instinct.[2]

2 Ke Yuan, 中国神话故事集 [*Collection of Chinese Mythological Stories*] (Beijing: 中国少年儿童新闻出版总社 [China Children's Press & Publication Group], 2017, 5-8.

SEGMENT 02
Nüwa Creates Humanity
[女娲造人]

Drawing, Artifacts & Mythical Inspirations

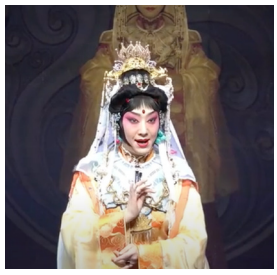
NÜWA: SNAKE IMAGERY



Snake Imagery: *In the Classic of Mountains and Seas, the goddess Nüwa is shown as a female being with a human head and a snake-like body. In Chinese ideology, snakes are associated with birth, death, and immortality. The snake's moulting skin can be seen as a symbol of immortality, a continuous cycle of rebirth.*

ARTIFACT 2A: CHINESE OPERA COSTUME





The Mythical Image: *For contemporary audiences, especially older generations, images and exposure to primordial figures and folk heroes in mythical stories typically came from Chinese opera. Early television adaptations of mythical narratives and legends in the late 20th century often featured modified costuming for key figures, taking heavy inspiration from Chinese opera dress.*

NÜWA: THE MOTHER OF HUMANITY

The Mother Goddess: *The myth of Nüwa predates Pangu. She is the mother goddess of humanity who organized the world and protected the feeble humans. In later texts, she is depicted alongside her brother and husband, Fuxi, a father figure who taught humanity cognition and knowledge, ensuring their survival in the new world. Their tails are often intertwined in a double helix, resembling DNA, an image of humanity's reproduction and longevity (See Artifact 5B).*

SEGMENT 02
Nüwa Creates Humanity
[女娲造人]

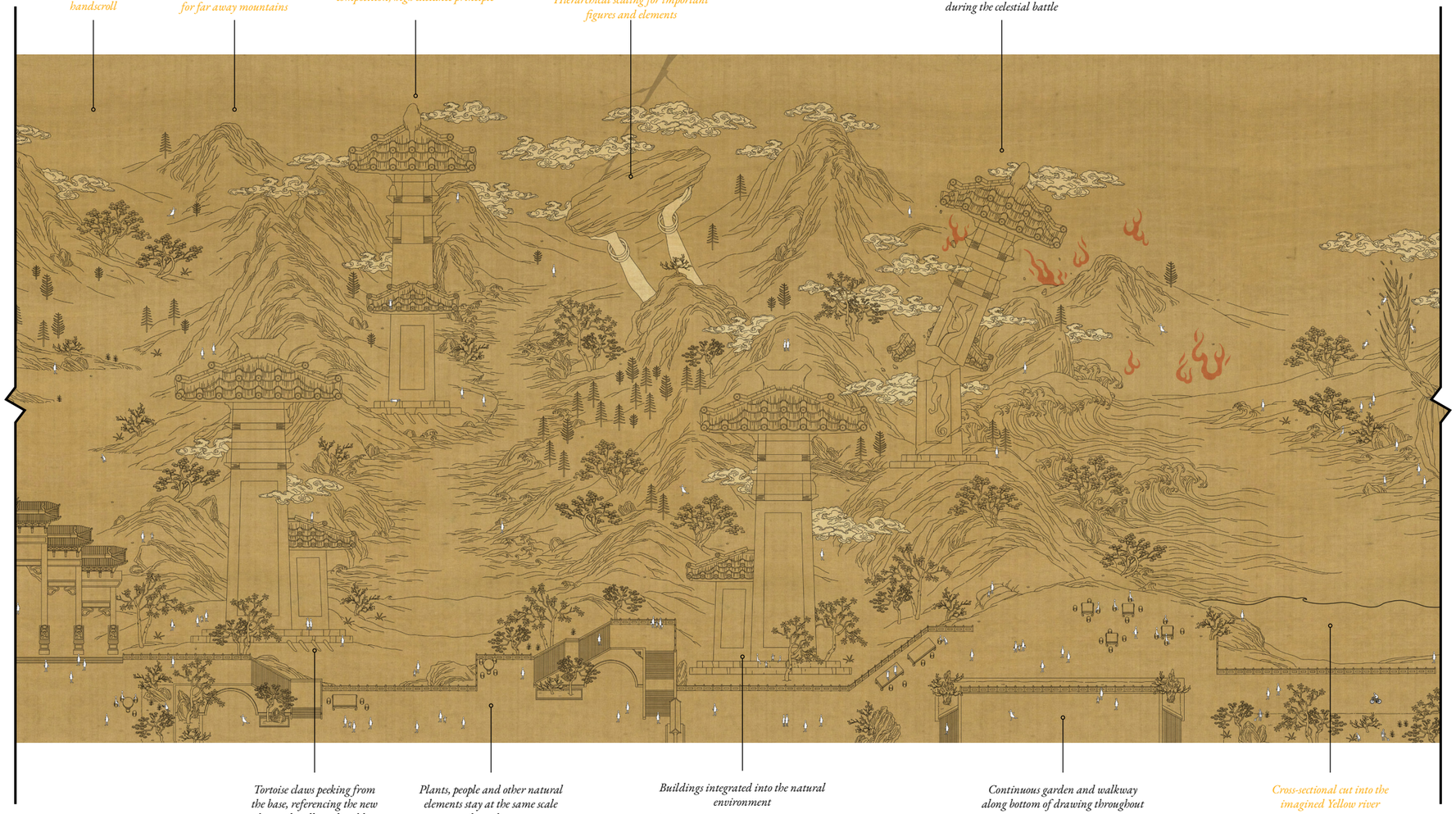
SEGMENT 02: LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 3.2.1 (Page 72) Drawing by author. Drawing Segment 02, an enlarged segment of the final handscroll, loosely inspired by the creation myth Nüwa Creates Humanity.

Fig. 3.2.2 (Opposite, top) Illustration attributed to Jiang Yinghao [蒋应镐], *Complete Picture of Mountains and Seas*, Ming Dynasty, c. 1597. Scanned image of illustration by unknown author, 2011. Illustration of the goddess Nüwa in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, showing a human head with a snake-like body.

Fig. 3.2.3 (Opposite, bottom, far left) Cropped screenshot of Youtube video by author. Youtube video from Zheng Lu, 2021, 11:20. The goddess Nüwa in a modern Chinese Beijing opera production of *Fengshenbang* [封神榜], a play based off the novel *The Investiture of the Gods* [封神演义], 2021.

Fig. 3.2.4 (Opposite, bottom, left) Cropped screenshot of Youtube video by author. Youtube video from Zheng Lu, 2021, 11:39. The goddess Nüwa in a modern Chinese Beijing opera production of *Fengshenbang* [封神榜], a play based off the novel *The Investiture of the Gods* [封神演义], 2021.



SEGMENT 03

Nüwa Mends the Sky
[女娲补天]

Drawing, Artifacts & Mythical Inspirations

DRAWING INTENTIONS

Across the river from the previous tale, the battle between fire and water causes disaster on the land, ultimately striking down one of the great heavenly pillars.

In the drawing, the four pillars are represented by ceremonial gate towers called que [阙]. Each pillar is shown as a different elevation view of the same que, allowing for a simultaneous view of the tower in all directions in the same composition.

Although the ques are intended to be arranged in a square formation, the ques at the back were shifted to the left so that all the towers are visible. Ques farther away are placed higher on the canvas to convey distance. Natural elements overlap and disappear behind the pillars, signifying spatial depth. Compared with the surrounding environment, the ques are enlarged to express their celestial nature within the mythical landscape. The que to the left of the scroll has small tortoise claws peeking from its base, referencing the new heavenly pillars set by Nüwa.

Between the towers, large arms protrude from the landscape, raising a large five-coloured boulder to the skies to patch the gaping hole in the heavens. The bracelets on her wrists are also visible on the figure in the previous drawing segment. The figure of Nüwa appears again, indicating a change in time, place, and narrative.

MYTH SUMMARY

Under Nüwa's protection and guidance, her children flourished across the land. But soon, disaster struck as the feud between the fire deity [祝融 - Zhurong] and the water deity [共工 - Gonggong] turned the prospering land into a battlefield. In the heat of battle, one of the great heavenly pillars was broken. The skies cracked open, and a celestial flood poured down from the heavens.

To save her children and restore cosmic order, Nüwa scoured the land for five coloured stones (white, azure, black, red, yellow), melted them together to mend the gaping sky with the molten mixture. Then, she severed the limbs of a large, cosmic tortoise and used them as the new pillars to prop up the sky. Next, she subdued the beasts and dragons that terrorized and devoured the people. Finally, Nüwa gathered and burned reeds from the riverside and used them to dam and control the swirling floodwaters.

SEGMENT 03
Nüwa Mends the Heavens
[女娲补天]

Drawing, Artifacts & Mythical Inspirations

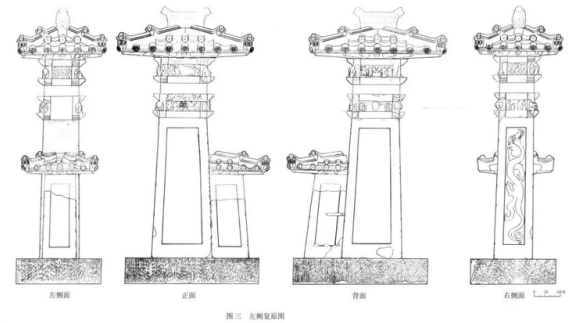
MYTH SUMMARY CONT'D

The scars of the catastrophe still remain. The skies are permanently tilted. Some versions of the myth say the cosmic tilt is because the tortoise's legs are uneven. This is why the sun, moon and stars move towards the west, and why all the major rivers in China flow to the Eastern Sea.[3]

TORTOISE IMAGERY

The shell of the tortoise signifies protection against external forces. With its hard shell and long life, the cosmic tortoise has the power to carry the weight of the sky and shield humanity for eternity.

ARTIFACT 3A: QUE [阙]





Que are free-standing ceremonial gate towers, typically placed in pairs in front of palaces, temples, and government buildings to mark a symbolic boundary of the premises. In some cases, que towers are part of the architectural ensemble in front of stone tombs and graves, defining the border between the mortal and spirit world. Tomb ques symbolize the passage of the soul into the spiritual realm and are a link to the heavens.

In the drawing, the four ques act as the heavenly pillars, standing before the arms of Nüwa as she prepares to mend the skies. The ques mark the boundaries where celestial forces are at play. One may also interpret the scene as a funerary scene for the mother goddess. In some versions of the myth, Nüwa "passes away" after her great celestial mend. Having served her destiny and purpose in saving her children and restoring cosmic order, her essence returns to the world.

ARTIFACT 3B: MENDING THE SKY



Imagery of Nüwa's great celestial mend typically depicts her holding up a large boulder. The five coloured earths that make up the stone are gathered from the four cardinal directions and the "centre," corresponding to the five elements: gold, wood, water, fire, earth. In this instance, they are not the literal elements but the internal attributes that make up the world, known as Wuxing [五行]. Along with yin-yang, the five elements are a core concept in Chinese philosophy. Mixed together, the five elements create balance in space and time, ensuring prosperity and harmony.

3 Ke Yuan, 中国神话故事集 [*Collection of Chinese Mythological Stories*] (Beijing: 中国少年儿童新闻出版总社 [China Children's Press & Publication Group], 2017, 5-8.

SEGMENT 03
Nüwa Mends the Sky
[女娲补天]

SEGMENT 03: LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 3.3.1 (Page 75) Drawing by author. Drawing Segment 03, an enlarged segment of the final handscroll, loosely inspired by the myth Nüwa Mends the Sky.

Fig. 3.3.2 (Opposite, top, left) Architectural reconstruction drawing by Chongqing Cultural Relics and Archaeology Research Institute [重庆市文物考古研究院], 2001-2003. A series of elevation views of the *Wuyang* stone que [乌杨石阙], Han Dynasty.

Fig. 3.3.3 (Opposite, bottom, left) Photograph by @仁和里拾柒路过人间, 2023. Photograph of the *Wuyang* stone que [乌杨石阙], Han Dynasty, located in the Chongqing China Three Gorges Museum in Chongqing, China.

Fig. 3.3.4 (Opposite, right) Illustration by Xiao Yuncong, 女媧補天圖, c. 1596-1673. Image of illustration by @Meidosensei, 2020. The goddess Nüwa mending the sky with the five-coloured cosmic stone from *Lisaotu* [离骚图], an illustrated woodblock book by Qing dynasty artist Xiao Yuncong, 1645.

SECTION 2: DIVINE LESSONS SERIES



Fig. 3.4.1 Drawing by author. Enlarged image of the second section of the handscroll, the "Divine Lessons Series."



SEGMENT 04

Suiren and the First Fire
[燧人氏钻木取火]

Drawing, Artifacts & Mythical Inspirations

DRAWING INTENTIONS

The fourth segment is inspired by the myth of the culture hero Suiren, the first of three key figures in the Divine Lessons Series. In his story, Suiren teaches humanity how to start a fire by friction, after observing divine birds pecking at the bark of a glowing fire tree called Suimu [燧木].

The centrepiece of this segment is an imagined altar of Suiren at the peak of a tall mountain. In Chinese ideology, mountains are considered to be bodies of knowledge and are associated with elevating consciousness.

There are two main points of entry at the base of the Suiren altar. One is within the mythical landscape where a small set of dirt stairs is bordered by stone plinths. On each plinth is an ancient "solar ignitor" called yangsui [阳燧]. The other entry point is marked by Artifact 4A, the Gate of Suiren Tomb, allowing the imagined visitor to enter the mythical scene from the walkway. Visitors can also explore the hollowed-out space beneath the grand stairs.

An enormous statue of Suiren sits embedded in the mountain, with only its head above ground, forming the main altar at the peak. The rest of its body is only visible to the audience through the cross-section cut through the mountain and stairs. The statue is drawn in side elevation, and the line work resembles the contour lines of the adjacent mountains. In the statue's hand rests a fire-shaped amulet. Within the orb is an abstract scene of how Suiren learned to make fire from the divine birds.

Details of the fire myth are depicted on the statue's stone robes and cape in front elevation view, replicating the flatness of the Artifact 4C wall relief. The figures are reminiscent of the symbolic, repeated figures in aspective view.

Adjacent to the cross-section view of the altar is the same structure presented in Hejduk's degree-zero axonometric, rotated 90 degrees, portraying how an imaginary student would see the altar as they ascend the stairs. Two views of the same altar appear simultaneously in a single image, showing how the space is experienced by different people at different times.

After passing through the gates behind the bust of Suiren, we enter the Garden of Knowledge. Lessons by different deities and cultural heroes are taught to humanity. In one area of the garden stands the Suimu tree, aflame with sparks from divine birds pecking its bark. After observing the same phenomenon as Suiren, students are shown how to create fire by friction.

SEGMENT 04
Suiren and the First Fire
[燧人氏钻木取火]

Drawing, Artifacts & Mythical Inspirations

MYTH SUMMARY

To the west is a divine kingdom called Suiming [燧明国]. At the centre of the kingdom was a tall, glowing tree called Suimu [燧木].

One day, Suiren came to see the tree to investigate the source of the light. He realized that within the tree were divine birds. The birds would peck their beaks against the bark of the tree to create sparks. He saw that the places their beaks pecked would ignite.

From his observations, he was struck with an idea. Suiren then gathered a few branches and began to rub the pointed ends of one branch on another. After numerous tries, he finally saw a spark. Suiren taught this newfound method of creating fire to others, allowing for the first fire made by humanity's own hands - a monumental discovery. It was the first time humanity had created one of the elements.[4]

ARTIFACT 4A: ENTRY GATE AT SUIREN TOMB



Entry gate to the Suiren Tomb [燧皇陵 - Suihuangling], located in the Shangqiu Fire Culture Scenic Area in Henan, China. Although the modern memorial park and cultural site was reconstructed in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the original burial tomb dates to antiquity, around the Spring and Autumn Period (c. 770 - 481 BC).

ARTIFACT 4B: STATUE OF SUIREN



Statue of Suiren found in the Suiren Tomb Memorial Park. Its likeness is used in the bust and embedded statue in the drawing segment.

ASCENDING THE MOUNTAIN: JOURNEY FOR KNOWLEDGE

Mountains symbolize knowledge in Chinese culture and are associated with elevating consciousness. Numerous stories feature heroes ascending a mountain to gain knowledge, skill, or immortality. Mountains also serve as ritual sites, mythical abodes for immortals, and pilgrimage destinations. Mountains are believed to hold thousands of years of cultural knowledge and memory within the layers of rock and earth.

4 Ke Yuan, 中国古代神话 [*Myths of Ancient China*] (Shanghai: 华东师范大学出版社 East China Normal University Press], 2017), 31-32.

SEGMENT 04
Suiren and the First Fire
[燧人氏钻木取火]

Drawing, Artifacts & Mythical Inspirations

ARTIFACT 4C: SUIREN MYTH WALL RELIEF



Fire is protection and a weapon. The ability to create fire at will gave humanity courage. Suiren, as the mythical fire bringer, symbolizes the first spark of civilization. The relief above depicts Suiren creating the first fire and the benefits that knowledge brought humanity, including cooking, lighting the dark, and hunting and scaring away predators. The details of the relief are adapted into the robes of the underground Suiren statue.

ARTIFACT 4D: SUN MIRROR - YANGSUI [阳燧]





Ancient "Lighter": *A yangsui is a small, hand-sized concave bronze mirror used as a fire starter by concentrating sunlight to ignite tinder. These ancient "solar ignitors" date back thousands of years, having been widely used in the Eastern Zhou Dynasty (c. 770 - 256 BC). References to yangsui are featured at the top of the fire pillars along the base of the great stairs and on entry stone plinths at the bottom right of the segment.*

SEGMENT 04: LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 3.4.2 (Page 79) Drawing by author. Drawing Segment 04, an enlarged segment of the final handscroll, loosely inspired by the fire myth Suiren and the First Fire.

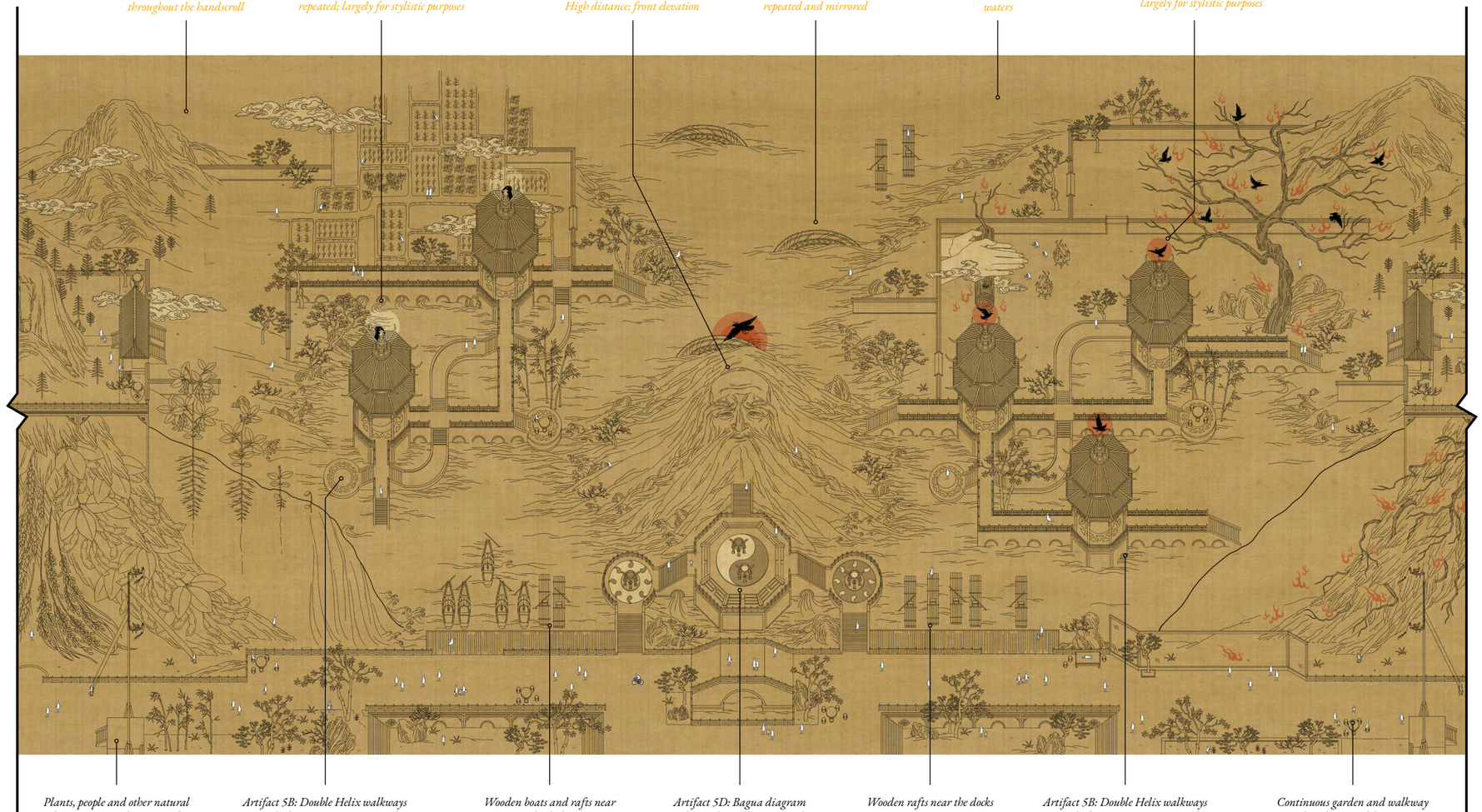
Fig. 3.4.3 (Opposite, left) Photograph by Gary Todd, 2008. Entry gate to the Suiren Tomb [燧皇陵 - *Suihuangling*] located in the Shangqiu Fire Culture Scenic Area in Henan, China.

Fig. 3.4.4 (Opposite, right) Photograph from @宗谱链, 2024. Statue of Suiren in the Suiren Tomb memorial park.

Fig. 3.4.5 (Top, left) Photograph by unknown author. Relief featuring imagery from the fire myth Suiren.

Fig. 3.4.6 (Bottom, far left) Photograph from Yangzhou Museum [扬州博物馆]. Decorative etchings of a coiled serpent on the back of a Western Han Dynasty bronze *yangsui* mirror [西汉蟠螭纹铜阳燧], located in the Yangzhou Museum in Jiangsu, China, 8.0cm diameter.

Fig. 3.4.7 (Bottom, left) Photograph by @军影迷踪, 2014. An enlarged *yangsui* sculpture replica for demonstrating how the ancient solar lighter is used, located in the Guo State Museum in Sanmenxia City [三门峡虢国博物馆] Henan, China.



SEGMENT 05

Fuxi's Eye of Knowledge
[伏羲八卦]

Drawing, Artifacts & Mythical Inspirations

DRAWING INTENTIONS

The myth of Fuxi demonstrates how the Chinese people understood that true knowledge came from nature. This segment depicts the centre of the Garden of Knowledge, with Fuxi as the central figure.

A stone relief of Fuxi emerges from the water at the centre of the garden. The waters are a "sea of thought," referencing the Mandarin word for "mind" [脑海 - naohai or literally, a sea within the mind/brain]. This is the only body of water that does not terminate in a site section view at the walkway. This emphasizes the immaterial nature of thought and consciousness. It cannot be observed and analyzed with one's physical eyes. Behind and beyond the Fuxi relief, the sea stretches out into oblivion at the top of the canvas. The lack of contour lines in the water and the silk-textured background create an intended blankness, signifying the vast infinity of thought and knowledge in the world.

Fuxi's serpent body can be seen surfacing from the waters. The same portion of the serpent's body is mirrored and duplicated down the canvas to depict the distance and depth of the waters. The repetition of the same element in different areas of the drawing creates a sense of movement in space and time.

In front of the Fuxi relief is a series of raised platforms, again alluding to the ascent of a mountain as the ascent of consciousness. The details on the lower twin platforms are inspired by the raised platforms and landscape design in Artifact 5A. Meanwhile, the final upper platform adapts the visual form of the bagua diagram into the architecture. Drawn in Hejduk's axonometric, the visual form of the bagua diagram is present while preserving the depth of the steps. At the centre, two metal vessels complete the yin-yang floor detail. They are also portrayed in a drop back view to show the circular rim.

Further down, we find a series of docks along the bottom walkway, where boats and rafts are available for visitors to use to sail across the sea of thought. Notice there are rafts on the right, yet as we travel forward towards the left, after meeting Fuxi, the rafts have evolved into small boats.

Double helix (DNA) and yin-yang imagery associated with Fuxi are peppered throughout the drawing, most evidently in the intertwining corridors and pavilions framing the Fuxi relief. On the right, the primary corridor connecting the odd number (yang number) of pavilions represents yang, while the secondary pathway is yin. Yang and sun imagery appear in the solar pattern on the pavilion floor and on the roof, where a golden crow rests on the spire (See Artifact 7B).

SEGMENT 05
Fuxi's Eye of Knowledge
[伏羲八卦]

Drawing, Artifacts & Mythical Inspirations

DRAWING INTENTIONS CONT'D

A similar lunar floor pattern is visible on the viewing platforms connected to the secondary pathway. On the left, the pathways and imagery are inverted, featuring an even (yin) number of pavilions and moon imagery, specifically the lunar toad on the pavilion spire and the corresponding floor details.

The pavilion walkways are drawn in Hejduk's axonometric to demonstrate the double helix shape in plan while maintaining structural depth in elevation. Additionally, this mode of representation also shows the octagonal tiered roofs of the pavilions, calling back to the shape of the bagua diagram.

MYTH SUMMARY

In later texts, another legendary figure appears alongside the goddess Nüwa: Fuxi [伏羲]. He, too, is depicted with a human head and serpent body. In some myths, they are a couple; in others, they are siblings; sometimes both. As a father figure to humanity, Fuxi focused on teaching humanity so they might distinguish themselves from other animals.

Fuxi's eye of knowledge saw the inner workings of the universe and the laws that governed the world. Through his observations, he created the eight trigrams of prophecy [八卦- bagua], a set of symbols representing the nature of reality. He wanted to bestow this knowledge onto humanity. But first, he must teach them how to survive.

Fuxi gave the people cognition and thought. He taught humanity how to understand and use nature to survive. He created the bow and arrow and taught humanity how to hunt; he mimicked the spider web and taught humanity how to create nets to fish; he taught humanity how to use fire (naturally started) to cook food; he taught man how to use wood to create shelter. Nearly all the important skills humanity had were taught by Fuxi. Through his teachings, Fuxi guided humanity into awareness and growth.[5]

ARTIFACT 5A: MOUNTAIN RELIEF OF FUXI



A colosal sculpture relief of Fuxi carved into Mount Xian [岘山] in Xiangyang, Hubei Province, China, 2014. in Xiangyang, Hubei Province, China, 2014. It spans 230m wide and 70.5m tall.

ARTIFACT 5B: DOUBLE HELIX SYMBOLISM

Fuxi and Nüwa are often portrayed with their tails intertwined, reminiscent of a double helix or DNA.



5 中国 [*China*], season 3, episode 1, "创世 [*Creation*]," aired October 1, 2023, on Hunan TV.

SEGMENT 05
Fuxi's Eye of Knowledge
[伏羲八卦]

Drawing, Artifacts & Mythical Inspirations

ARTIFACT 5C: SOLAR AND LUNAR IMAGERY



Solar Imagery (Right): Three-legged golden crows [三足金乌] are thought to be the carriers of the sun and associated with yang energy. See Segment 07.

Lunar Imagery (Left): The lunar toad [月蟾] is mentioned in some legends as residents on the moon, companions of the moon goddess Chang'e and the Jade rabbit, and linked to yin energy. In some stories, Chang'e is turned into a lunar toad as punishment for stealing an elixir of immortality. See Segment 08.

ARTIFACT 5D: PRIMORDIAL BAGUA DIAGRAM [八卦]



Fuxi developed the eight trigrams, bagua, through his observations of the universal principles of the natural world. Each trigram denotes a different element. The trigrams are arranged based on the geographical and climatic attributes of ancient China and were used in divination and ritual. Meanwhile, the trigrams used in Fengshui practices are arranged differently.

SEGMENT 05: LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 3.5.1 (Page 82) Drawing by author. Drawing Segment 05, an enlarged segment of the final handscroll, loosely inspired by the mythical tales of the primordial deity Fuxi.

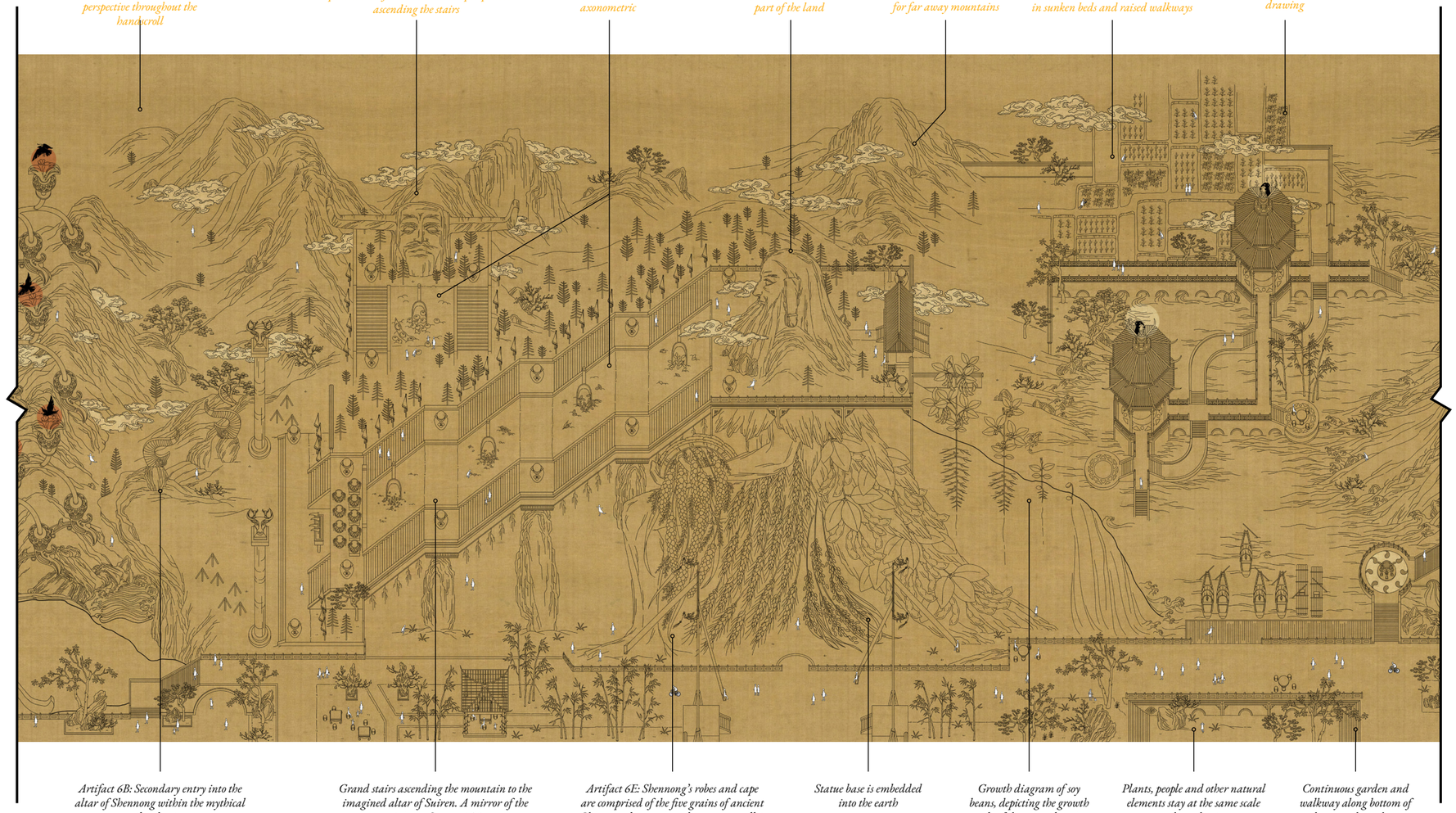
Fig. 3.5.2 (Opposite, top, right) Photograph by @宁静致远, 2024. Mountain relief of Fuxi at Mount Xian in Hubei, China, 2014.

Fig. 3.5.3 (Opposite, top, far right) Photograph by @步来克兔旅游攻略, 2025. Mountain relief of Fuxi at Mount Xian in Hubei, China, 2014, showing the adjacent landscape design

Fig. 3.5.4 (Opposite, bottom) Photograph by Ibolya Horváth, 2020. Image of the deities Fuxi and Nüwa with their tails intertwined.

Fig. 3.5.5 (Top, left) Close-up detail of image by author. Image by Dr. Jennifer N. McIntire, 2015. Detail (top area) of a t-shaped silk funeral banner, *Funeral banner of Lady Dai (Xin Zhui)* found in the *King Ma Tomb* [马王堆汉墓], unearthed in Hunan, China, from the Western Han Dynasty (c. 168 BC). Currently housed in the Hunan Provincial Museum. The top right area shows imagery of the sun and a golden crow, while the top left area has depictions of the moon and a jade rabbit and lunar toad. Lunar toad [月蟾], imagery associated with the moon and yin energy. Three-legged golden crow [三足金乌], imagery associated with the sun and yang energy.

Fig. 3.5.6 (Bottom, left) Image by One World Nations Online. Primordial bagua diagram.



Moving viewpoint perspective throughout the handscroll

Secondary view of grand stairs featuring Artifact 6A: Statue of Shennong embedded in the earth
Same structure drawn in front view Hejduk degree-zero axonometric; a repeated view from the students' perspective ascending the stairs

Artifact 6F: Bin of dried goods found in Chinese supermarkets
Pits between flights of stairs and food scroop shown in Hejduk's axonometric

Artifact 6B: Statue of Shennong embedded in the earth
Drawn in side view; contour lines are similar to the natural landscape, implying the statue is part of the land

Deep distance principle for far away mountains

Early crop farm system and people tending the land using Artifact 6D
Hejduk's axonometric to show plan view of crop farm while maintaining depth in sunken beds and raised walkways

Farming crops
Aspective; Alex Wall drawing

Artifact 6B: Secondary entry into the altar of Shennong within the mythical landscape
Buffalo horns and path beneath are drawn in Hejduk's axonometric, copied and mirrored.

Grand stairs ascending the mountain to the imagined altar of Suiren. A mirror of the stairs in Segment 04
Drawn in elevation to replicate wall relief. Aspective-adjacent representation of the repeated primitive figures overlapping one another per original artifact.

Artifact 6E: Shennong's robes and cape are comprised of the five grains of ancient China: soy beans, rice, wheat, proso millet, and foxtail millet
Drawn in elevation to replicate wall relief. Aspective-adjacent representation of the repeated primitive figures overlapping one another per original artifact.

Statue base is embedded into the earth
Cross-sectional cut into the landscape near the visitor's walkway to show the body of the statue hidden beneath the earth

Growth diagram of soy beans, depicting the growth cycle of the same plant in one area
Front elevation; cross-sectional cut in the earth to show root structure

Plants, people and other natural elements stay at the same scale throughout
Aspective; Alex Wall drawing

Continuous garden and walkway along bottom of drawing throughout
Hejduk's axonometric degree zero for architectural elements; moving viewpoint perspective

non-perspective techniques *general, artifact & mythical notes*

SEGMENT 06
Shennong and Agriculture
[神农氏]

Drawing, Artifacts & Mythical Inspirations

DRAWING INTENTIONS

The final teacher in the series is the culture hero Shennong, often considered the father of agriculture and medicine. He is depicted with a cow/buffalo head (or a head with cow horns) and a human body. Shennong is largely credited with teaching early Chinese societies how to farm. He invented foundational agricultural tools such as the plow [耒耜], irrigation methods, and cultivated the five grains of ancient China [五谷].

This area mirrors Segment 04 (Suiren and the First Fire), depicting similar elements, such as a grand set of stairs leading to the imagined altar of Shennong. The altar of Shennong employs a combination of orthographic site section and elevation, Hejduk's axonometric, high distance, and hierarchical scaling. The cross-sectional cut into the land reveals the statue beneath the earth and caverns beneath the grand stairs. The stairs are drawn in Hejduk's axonometric to show the bins of grain in plan and the tiered ascent up the mountain in the side elevation. The statue is also shown in the side elevation, using the high distance principle and hierarchical scaling to emphasize its majesty and grandeur as the key figure within the segment.

he yangsui mirrors at the entry gate of the Suiren altar are replaced with buffalo horns (Artifact 6B), while the adjacent pillars are adorned with buffalo heads. In addition, large storage vessels for preserving food sit between each flight of stairs. The architecture and landscape are taken from Artifact 6A, a real Shennong Altar in the Hubei province.

To the right of the stairs is a drop-back view of an early farm system. Hejduk's axonometric is used to show a plan view of the farming grounds while maintaining a sense of depth in the sunken beds and raised walkways. Mixed within are crops drawn in aspective. Figures can be seen working and learning in the fields. Further down the page, near the statue's cape, is a simple growth diagram of soybeans. All phases of growth are shown at once in ascending positions to demonstrate a "growth" in time and a "growth/elevation" in knowledge.

The semi-embedded statue of Shennong is wrapped in the five grains of ancient China (Artifact 6E). Soybeans peek out from the spaces between the stone cape. Rice and wheat fall from his lap to become its robes. The two millets hang from the bundle of harvest in its hands. The five grains can also be found between the twin sets of stairs. "Bins" of large seeds reminiscent of the dried goods bins found in modern Chinese supermarkets (Artifact 6F). The seeds may be parting gifts to those descending the mountain, taking with them new agricultural learnings and spreading the grains and knowledge to others across the ancient land.

SEGMENT 06
Shennong and Agriculture
[神农氏]

Drawing, Artifacts & Mythical Inspirations

MYTH SUMMARY

By this time, humanity had grown to the point where hunting and fishing could no longer sustain the population. War and conflict rose as people fought for limited resources. This worried the deity Shennong.

One day, while he looked out at the wilderness in deliberation, specks of grain fell from the sky like raindrops. Suddenly Shennong understood. They say Shennong collected different seeds floating about in the wind and planted them in the earth, cultivating the five grains of ancient China: rice [稻], two kinds of millet [黍] [稷], wheat [麦], and soybeans [菽].

Shennong spread farming knowledge, guiding people in different regions to plant different types of seeds. To increase productivity, he tamed the ox and invented the plow, fashioned out of wood. Farming was a laborious yet fruitful and stable task. Shennong taught humanity how to rely on the earth. As long as the earth is present, Shennong is present.[6]

ARTIFACT 6A: SHENNONG ALTAR [神农坛]



Shennong Altar is a cultural and scenic site built in 1997 and located in Shennongjia Forest District, Hubei, China. At the top of the grand stairs is a massive stone statue of Shennong, over 20m tall and 35m wide. The altar is designed in the style of traditional Chinese royal gardens. In front of the statue is the Heaven Altar, reserved specifically for emperors in ritual. At the same time, "ordinary people" would worship and perform sacrifices at the Earth Altar located at the base of the stairs.

ARTIFACT 6B: ENTRANCE TO SHENNONG ALTAR - BUFFALO HORNS



A pair of brass buffalo-horn statues frame the entrance gate of the Shennong Altar. They also appear on the entry steps of the Shennong Altar in the drawing.

ARTIFACT 6C: STATUE OF SHENNONG



Statue of Shennong located in the Mount Shennong Scenic Area [神农山风景区] in Qinyang City, Henan, China. Its likeness and posture are borrowed from the Shennong statue in the drawing.

ARTIFACT 6D: ANCIENT PLOW - LEISI [耒耜]

Shennong created the plow to aid in humanity's agricultural efforts and improve efficiency.

6 中国 [*China*], season 3, episode 1, "创世 [*Creation*]," aired October 1, 2023, on Hunan TV.

SEGMENT 06
Shennong and Agriculture
[神农氏]

Drawing, Artifacts & Mythical Inspirations

ARTIFACT 6E: FIVE GRAINS OF ANCIENT CHINA [五谷]

The five grains of ancient China are the foundational crops of early agriculture: rice [稻], proso millet [黍], foxtail millet [稷], wheat [麦], and soybeans [菽] These grains have deep ties to mythology and were considered gifts from the earth and the gods. Without earth and soil, humanity could not survive. Ancient kings and vassals held great sacrifices to the gods for peace and good harvests.

ARTIFACT 6F: CHINESE SUPERMARKET - GRAIN BINS

Bins of dried grain are commonly found in Chinese supermarkets. Fond childhood memories come to mind of fighting the impulse to dig my hands into the bin and feel the dry coolness of the beans cascade across my fingers (only to be scolded by my parents to stop).

SEGMENT 06: LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 3.6.1 (Page 85) Drawing by author. Drawing Segment 06, an enlarged segment of the final handscroll, loosely inspired by the teachings of the culture hero Shennong, especially in relation to agriculture and farming.

Fig. 3.6.2 (Opposite, left) Photograph by General Office of Hubei Provincial People's Government. Shennong Altar, a cultural site located in Shennongjia Forest District, Hubei, China, built in 1991.

Fig. 3.6.3 (Opposite, top, right) Photograph by @Crazy.traveler เที่ยวจะเครซี่, 2026, cropped by author. Entry gate of the Shennong Altar marked by twin buffalo horn statues.

Fig. 3.6.4 (Opposite, bottom, right) Photograph by unknown author, 2013. Statue of Shennong located in the Mount Shennong Scenic Area in Qinyang City, Henan, China.

SECTION 3: CELESTIAL BODIES SERIES

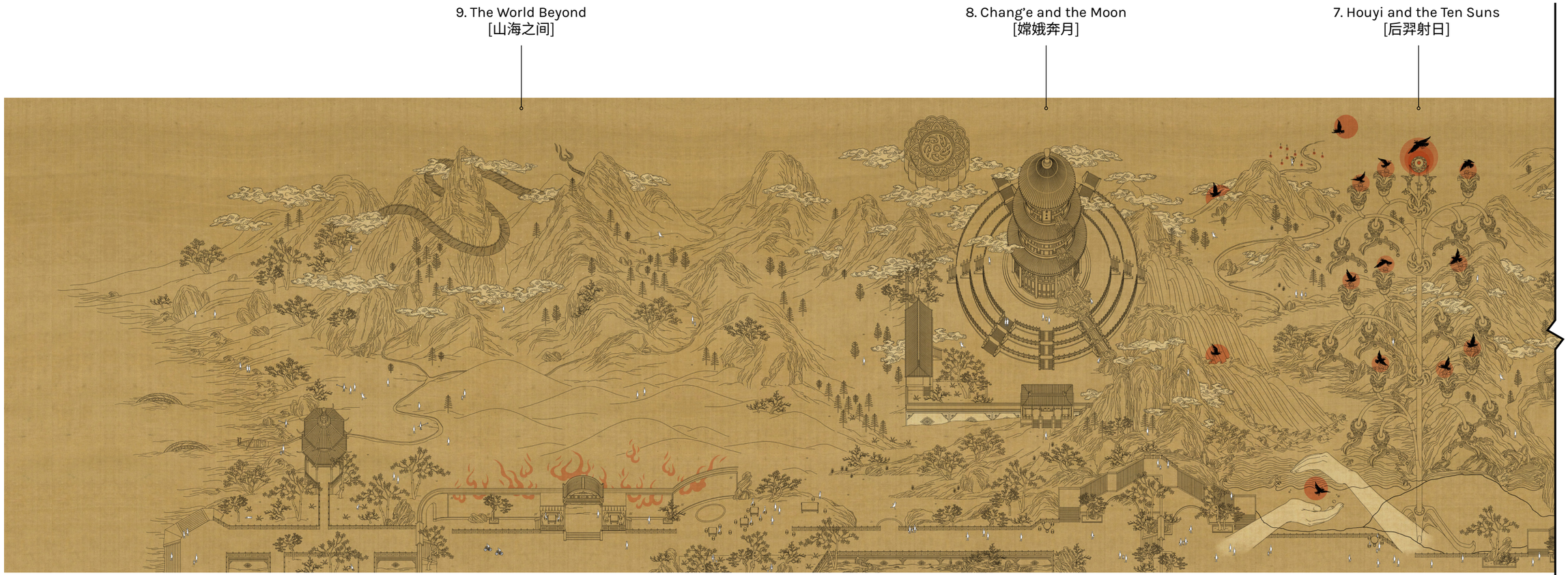


Fig. 3.7.1 Drawing by author. Enlarged image of the third section of the handscroll, the "Celestial Bodies Series."

SEGMENT 07
Houyi and the Ten Suns
[后羿射日]

Divine waters in the west, acting as a net to catch the sun as it sets, bringing it back to the Eastern Sea.

Moving viewpoint perspective; high distance principle to show the grandeur of the celestial falls.

Artifact 7C: Oracle bone script of the word "solstice" is used to portray Houyi's arrows

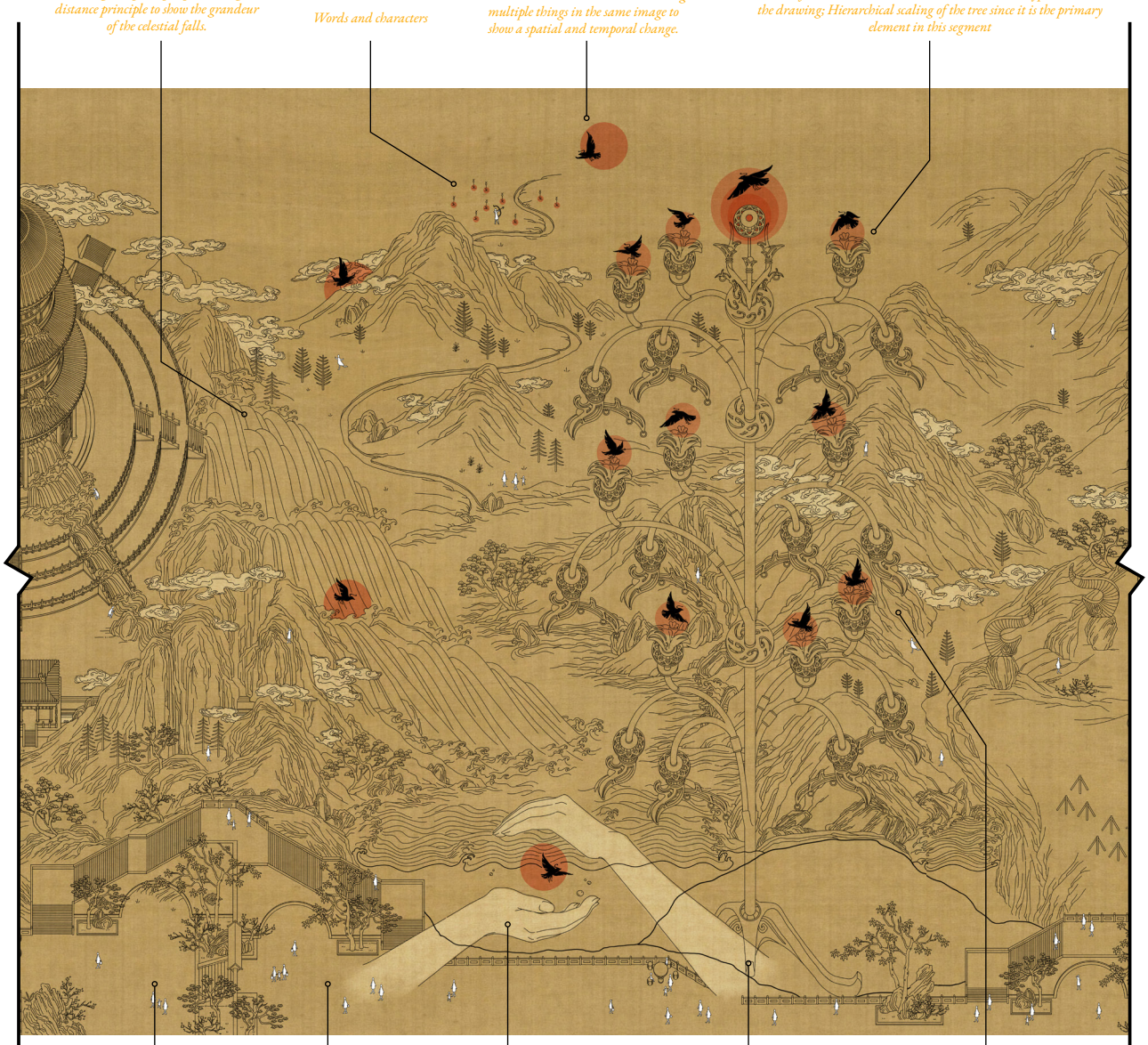
Words and characters

Artifact 7B: The suns are pulled across the sky by three-legged golden crows.

Repetition of the same or similar "characters" across the handscroll doing multiple things in the same image to show a spatial and temporal change.

Artifact 7A: The Sanxingdui Bronze Tree statue is used to represent the mythical Tree of Fusang

The statue is represented by an altered version of Hejduk's degree zero axonometric, where the plates on the branches and tree trunk are shown in typical degree zero view to see the ornamentation while the rest of the statue is shown in elevation, similar to typical trees in the drawing; Hierarchical scaling of the tree since it is the primary element in this segment



Plants, people and other natural elements stay at the same scale throughout

Aspective; Alex Wall drawing

Continuous garden and walkway along bottom of drawing throughout

Hejduk's axonometric degree zero for architectural elements; moving viewpoint perspective

The mother giving the sun(s) a bath at the end of the day

Hierarchical scaling in representing divine beings

Statue base is embedded into the earth like tree roots

Cross-sectional cut into the landscape near the visitor's walkway to show the statue base and the setting sun taking a bath in the Eastern Sea

Deep distance principle for mountain range

non-perspective techniques *general, artifact & mythical notes*

SEGMENT 07
Houyi and the Ten Suns
[后羿射日]

Drawing, Artifacts & Mythical Inspirations

DRAWING INTENTIONS

The Tree of Fusang statue stands near the "Eastern Sea" as the mythical Tree of Fusang, housing ten suns represented by ten three-legged golden crows [三足金乌]. Moving from right ("east") to left ("west"), we follow the sun's path as it rises and sets counterclockwise on the canvas, re-enacting a solar cycle in time and space within the scroll. Numerous suns appear at once on the scroll, both literally as a parhelion and figuratively, alluding to the passing of time.

At the top of the segment, nine arrows, represented by the oracle bone script for the word 'solstice' [至], protrude from the ground, depicting the aftermath of the myth in which Houyi shot nine suns from the sky. A figure with a nocked arrow is visible nearby. Now only one sun remains. Here is an evolution of knowledge, from the belief in a new sun that rises every day to understanding that a single sun cycles the Earth daily.

The sun returns and sets in the West, falling with the heavenly waters into the embrace of its mother in the Eastern Sea. The mother bathes the sun, now covered in dirt and dust from its journey, so that it may shine when it rises again the next day.

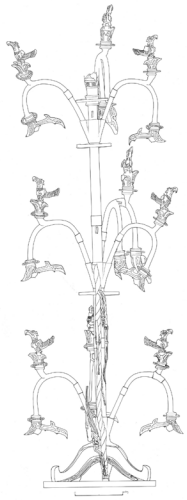
MYTH SUMMARY

Long ago, when the world was young, the suns danced freely across the sky. Every day, one after another, the suns took turns rising from the Eastern Sea, carried by divine birds across the heavens and disappearing beneath the Western horizon. But one day, ten suns rose to the skies at once, scorching the earth, withering fields, and drying the rivers. In some versions of the myth, the suns are the sons of the sage-king Yao [尧].

Amongst them was the archer Houyi, who could not bear to see humanity suffer any longer. To restore balance to the world, Yao bestowed Houyi with a mythical bow and arrows capable of shooting down the suns. Houyi nocked his arrows and aimed up at the sky. With each shot, a sun fell from the sky. When there was only one sun left, he hesitated. Houyi realized that should he unleash this final arrow, the world would be thrown into darkness and despair. Life and the Earth would not survive without the sun. At last, in an act of selflessness, Houyi spared the final sun, and the world fell back into order.[7]

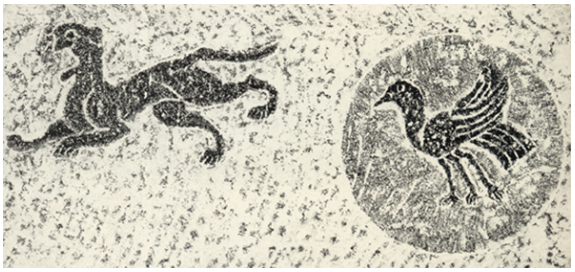
ARTIFACT 7A: TREE OF FUSANG [扶桑树]





Sanxingdui [三星堆] ***Bronze Sacred Tree statue,*** *late Shang dynasty (c. 1200 - 1050 BC), housed in the Sanxingdui Museum in Guanghan, Sichuan. Scholars connect the 13ft tall statue to Eastern sun myths. In the Classic of Mountains and Seas and in Chinese mythology, the Fusang tree* [扶桑树] *is where the ten suns reside before taking turns rising into the sky.*

ARTIFACT 7B: GOLDEN CROW [金乌]



On the branches of the Sanxingdui tree statue are bird-like creatures, thought to depict the golden crow, a sacred beast from the Classic of Mountains and Seas. It is said that the suns are pulled across the sky by birds, as they were the only creatures the ancient people knew that could fly. These birds are typically shown with three legs. Odd numbers are thought to be "yang" numbers, as the sun is a representation of yang energy.

7 Ke Yuan, 中国神话故事集 [*Collection of Chinese Mythological Stories*] (Beijing: 中国少年儿童新闻出版总社 [China Children's Press & Publication Group], 2017, 196-203.

SEGMENT 07
Houyi and the Ten Suns
[后羿射日]

Drawing, Artifacts & Mythical Inspirations

ARTIFACT 7C: ORACLE BONE SCRIPT - SOLSTICE [至]

Oracle Bone Script: *Oracle bone script [甲骨文 - jiaguwen] is the earliest systematic form of writing in China, dating back to the late Shang Dynasty [c. 1400 - 1100 BC]. Inscriptions carved into tortoise shells and animal bones were used for divination by ancient rulers and kings. Oracle bone script is the evolutionary ancestor of modern Chinese characters.*

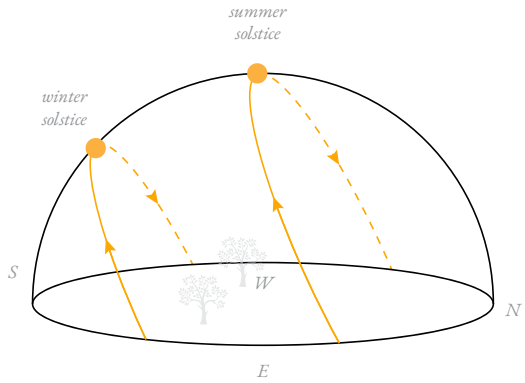
至 

The oracle bone script for the word 'solstice' [至] resembles an arrow stuck in the ground, alluding to the sun myth of Houyi. This inscription is used in the drawing segment to represent the nine arrows Houyi used to shoot the suns from the sky. There is a correlation between archery and time (i.e. the sun). The cross-sectional dome formed by the sun's path in the sky also resembles a bow. Rays of the sun are like arrows of light.

西 

Another interesting relation to the sun is the oracle bone script for the word 'west' [西], depicted as a nest. As mentioned before, the sun was thought to be pulled across the sky by golden crows. The birds fly across the sky and return to their nest at the end of the day, just as the sun flies across the sky and sets in the west to rest.[8]

CHANGE IN KNOWLEDGE: FROM TEN SUNS TO ONE



Ten Suns: *The core of any civilization is understanding the sun. The ten suns are a metaphor for an infinite number of suns. The ancient Chinese had no reason to believe the sun was the same celestial body every day, since it rises at different times and appears in different places on the horizon. Therefore, the sun that rises the next day is new.*

After years of observation, the people realized that the sun's path only changes within a defined sector throughout the year. It is higher in the summer and lower in the winter. The people set these points as the summer and winter solstices. This spatial parameter means there is a set number of suns. In addition, people realized that although the sun rises and sets at different times, it follows the same arc, known as the golden path [黄道]. Through these findings, the perspective on the sun changed from multiple to a single sun.

Stories and myths often compress a civilization's learning process, observations and knowledge gathered over thousands of years into a concentrated instant, a miracle. Houyi and the Ten Suns is a myth that captures a shift in understanding: from a new sun rising each day to the same sun rotating the Earth daily.[9]

8 考古公开课 [*Archeology Open Class*], "昆仑之谜 [*The Mystery of Kunlun*]," performed by 冯时 [Shi Feng] and hosted by 王筱磊 [Xiaolei Wang], aired May 9, 2024 and May 16, 2024, on CCTV10.

9 Ibid.

SEGMENT 07
Houyi and the Ten Suns
[后羿射日]

Drawing, Artifacts & Mythical Inspirations

PARHELION: OPTICAL ILLUSION OF LIGHT



The concept of ten suns in the sky may come from a natural phenomenon called a parhelion or sun dogs [幻日], in which an optical illusion of light can cause numerous suns to appear in the sky at once.

SEGMENT 07: LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 3.7.2 (Page 89) Drawing Segment 07, an enlarged segment of the final handscroll, loosely inspired by the sun myth Houyi and the Ten Suns.

Fig. 3.7.3 (Page 90, top, right) Photograph by @kudomomo, 2011. Sanxingdui Bronze Sacred Tree statue [三星堆青铜神树], late Shang dynasty (c. 1200 - 1050 BC), permanently housed in the Sanxingdui Museum in Sichuan, China.

Fig. 3.7.4 (Page 90, top, far right) Illustration by Sichuan Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, c. 1986. Image from Jinsha Site Museum[成都金沙遗址博物馆], 2021. Scaled artifact illustration of the Sanxingdui Bronze Sacred Tree statue.

Fig. 3.7.5 (Page 90, Bottom) Image from @ Whipsandchains, 2009. Three-legged golden crow detail found on a wall relief, Han Dynasty.

Fig. 3.7.6 (Opposite, top, left) Diagram by author. Comparison of the modern Chinese character and oracle bone script for the word “solstice” [至].

Fig. 3.7.7 (Opposite, bottom, left) Diagram by author. Comparison of the modern Chinese character and oracle bone script for the word “west” [西].

Fig. 3.7.8 (Opposite, right) Diagram by author. Diagram showing the spatial parameter of the sun’s path as observed and derived by the ancient Chinese people.

Fig. 3.7.9 (Left) Cropped screenshot of Youtube video by author. Youtube video from 台視新聞 TTV NEWS, 2024, 1:40. A parhelion where an optical illusion of light shows multiple suns in the sky at once. A recent phenomenon took place in Chengdu, Sichuan, China on August 2024, where an illusion of seven suns appeared in the sky at once.

SEGMENT 08

Chang'e and the Moon
[嫦娥奔月]

Artifact 8B: A mooncake is used to represent the moon, the top design incorporates the symbolic three rings with a common centre

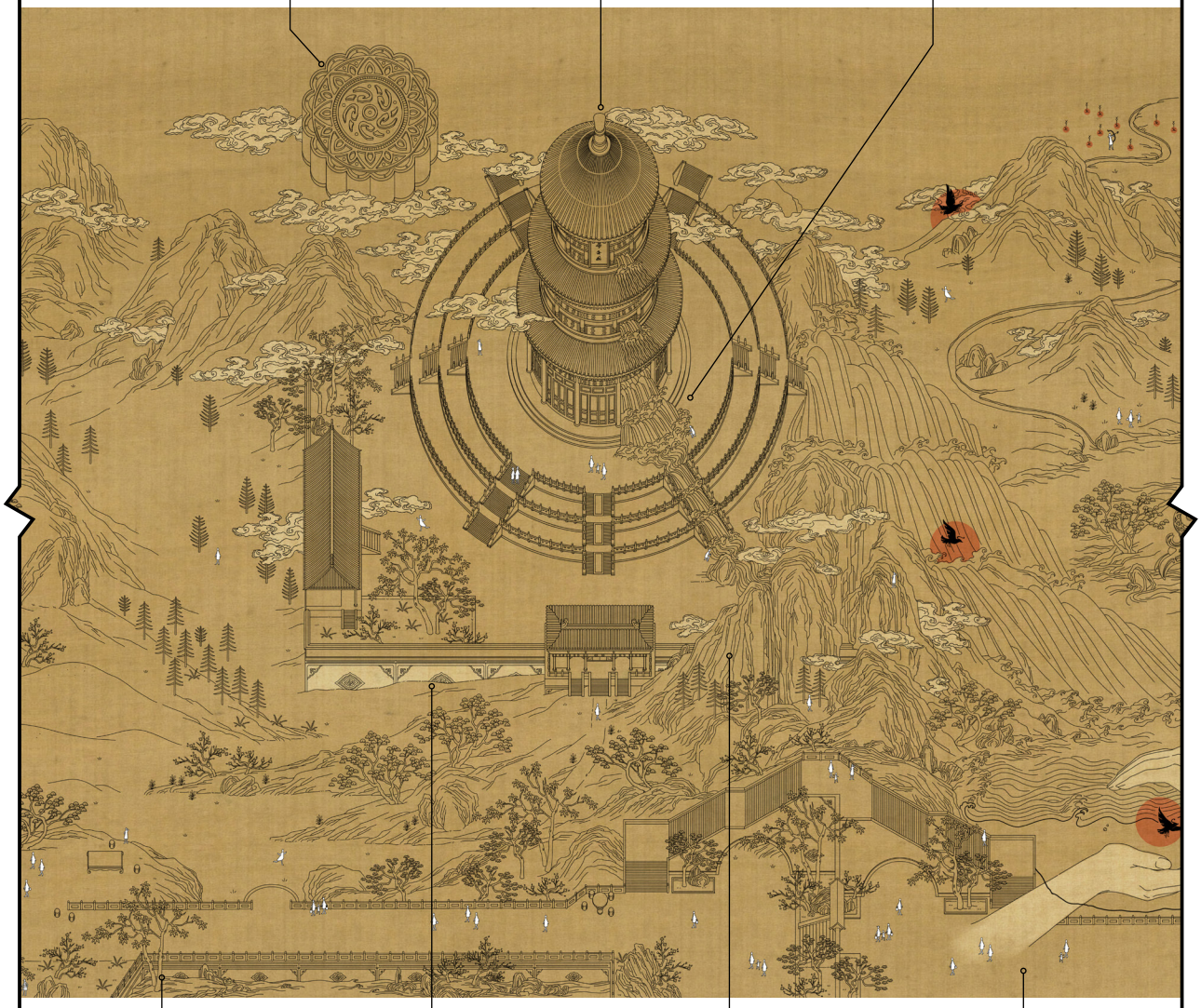
Hejduk's axonometric degree zero to show top design with three rings in undistorted plan while also showing the distinct shape of mooncakes in plan & elevation.

Artifact 8A: The Temple of Heaven is used to represent "the heavens"

Hejduk's degree zero axonometric is used to depict the three rings with a common centre in the stairs in undistorted plan. The overall composition employs vertical perspective where elements at the top of the scroll are further away (distance and height wise)

Source for the divine water in the previous myth is shown coming from the Temple or "the heavens"

Following Chinese painting principle where there should be a continuity within the drawing (e.g. an inlet for every river)



Plants, people and other natural elements stay at the same scale throughout

Aspective; Alex Wall drawing

Buildings integrated into the natural environment

Moving viewpoint perspective; viewing the small from the large; vertical stacking where things further away (distance and height wise) are shown higher on the picture plane

High distance principle for mountains

Continuous garden and walkway along bottom of drawing throughout

Hejduk's axonometric degree zero for architectural elements; moving viewpoint perspective

non-perspective techniques *general, artifact & mythical notes*

SEGMENT 08
Chang'e and the Moon
[嫦娥奔月]

Drawing, Artifacts & Mythical Inspirations

DRAWING INTENTIONS

This segment does not depict Chang'e's story; instead, it borrows elements from the myth to connect the preceding and subsequent myths.

Within the drawing segment, the Temple of Heaven portrays a general divine architecture, alluding to the moon palace where Chang'e resides after her ascension. he temple is drawn in Hejduk's degree-zero axonometric to show three rings with a common centre in the tiered roof and platform stairs, while preserving the physical depth of a dimensional object. Although the rings of the tiered roof overlap, they still share a common centre in the isometric view.

The temple's position in the drawing also allows the building to serve as a seamless link between the earth (at the bottom of the scroll) and the heavens (at the top of the scroll) within the composition. The building is grounded, embedded in the earth, yet also a sacred structure, its spire ascending into the clouds. The source of the divine water in the previous myth is the temple, where it falls into the "Eastern Sea."



The moon is portrayed by a mooncake. It is also placed higher in the drawing to convey distance from the adjacent temple, while the overlapping clouds emphasize spatial depth. The mooncake is drawn in Hejduk's axonometric, which highlights the three symbolic rings within the ornamentation at the top. The simultaneous elevation shows classic scalloped edges of the mooncake. The rest of the top-side design calls back to the details found on the branches of the Sangxingdui bronze tree statue.

MYTH SUMMARY: CHANG'E AND THE MOON [嫦娥奔月]

In a modern version of the myth, after Houyi saves humanity from disaster, the Queen Mother of the West [西王母 - Xiwangmu], the goddess of longevity, rewards him with an elixir of immortality. When Houyi returns home, he gives the elixir to his wife Chang'e for safekeeping.

One day, while Houyi is away, one of his apprentices, Fengmeng, breaks into Houyi's house to steal the elixir for himself. Chang'e resists, and in a moment of panic, she swallows the elixir. Her body begins to ascend into the skies, and she flees to the nearest celestial body, the moon. Later, Chang'e becomes the deity of the moon.

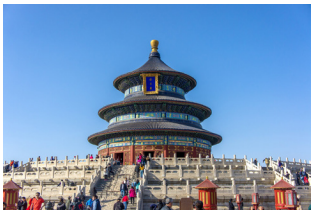
Earlier variations of the tale include Chang'e stealing the elixir from Houyi or Xiwangmu to achieve immortality and being banished to live in solitude on the moon as punishment. In other versions, Chang'e is turned into a toad as part of her punishment on the moon.[10]

10 Ke Yuan, 中国神话故事集 [*Collection of Chinese Mythological Stories*] (Beijing: 中国少年儿童新闻出版总社 [China Children's Press & Publication Group], 2017, 208-213.

SEGMENT 08
Chang'e and the Moon
[嫦娥奔月]

Drawing, Artifacts & Mythical Inspirations

ARTIFACT 8A: TEMPLE OF HEAVEN [天坛]



Beijing, China, built c. 1420. *The Temple of Heaven was an imperial place of worship during the Ming and Qing dynasties. To worship or offer sacrifices to the heavens, the site must resemble the heavens (i.e., round, with three rings sharing a common centre) so that it is recognizable to the gods and deities. The temple features three tiers in the platform stairs and three tiers in the roof structure. In plan view, both portray three rings with a common centre.*

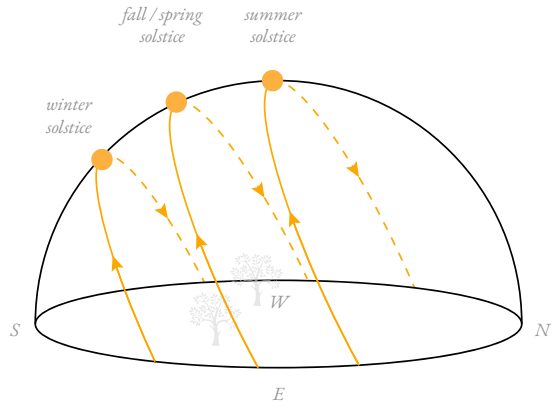
ARTIFACT 8B: MOONCAKES

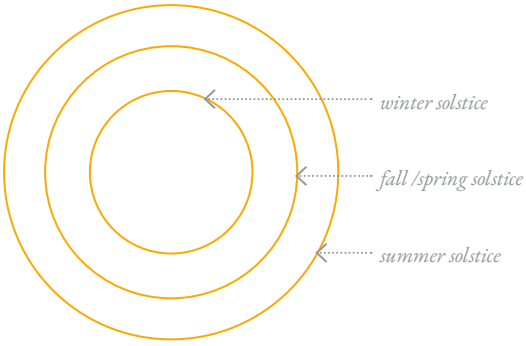


Mooncakes are flat, round pastries eaten during the Mid-Autumn Festival [中秋节], celebrated on the full moon of the 15th day of the eighth lunar month. Their roundness resembles the full moon, symbolizing family unity.

The festival and mooncakes are linked to Chang'e in modern versions of the myth. Some say that after Chang'e drinks the elixir and ascends to the moon, round moon-shaped pastries were made as an offering by Houyi to honour his late wife and in hopes of reuniting with Chang'e.

THREE RINGS: IMAGE OF HEAVEN





Origin of the Three Rings: *Three rings with a common centre are seen as an image of heaven. It is derived from the three arcs of the sun in the sky as it changes position throughout the year. The ancient Chinese people realized the sun only changes its path within the summer and winter solstices.*



Jade Vessel [玉壁]:
Used to perform rituals; the vessel is round and its surface is ornamented with three rings.

SEGMENT 08
Chang'e and the Moon
[嫦娥奔月]

SEGMENT 08: LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 3.8.1 (Page 93) Drawing by author. Drawing Segment 08, an enlarged segment of the final handscroll, loosely inspired by the myth Chang'e Leaps to the Moon.

Fig. 3.8.2 (Page 94) Diagram by author. Diagram depicting the three rings with a common centre shown in the temple stairs, roof, and adjacent mooncake embellishments.

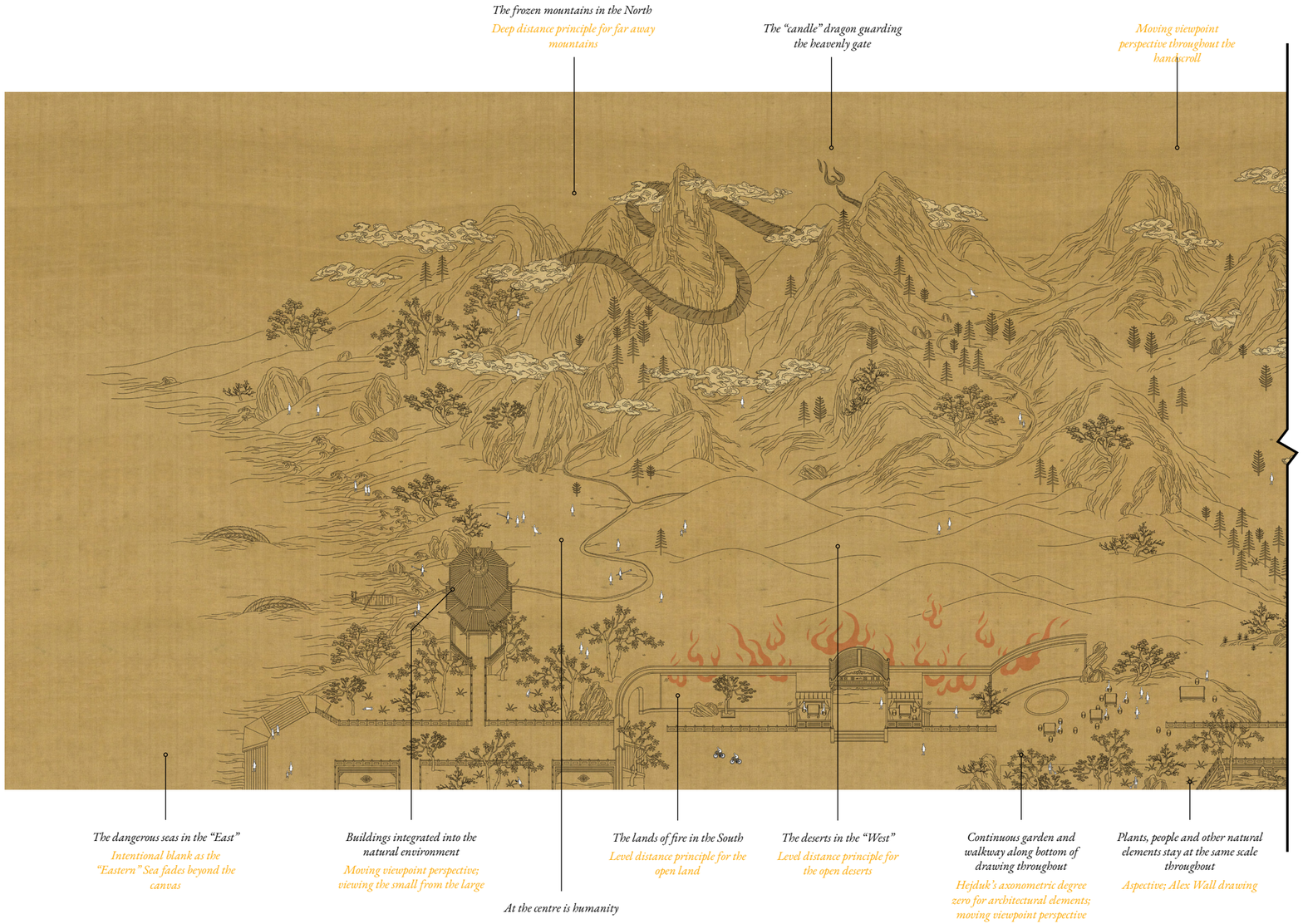
Fig. 3.8.3 (Opposite, top, left) Photograph by @Shujianyang, 2016. The Temple of Heaven, an imperial place of worship during the Ming and Qing dynasty, Beijing, China, built c. 1420.

Fig. 3.8.4 (Opposite, bottom, left) Photograph by @missKaren, 2006. Mooncakes, flat, round pastries resembling the full moon and eaten during the Mid-Autumn festival.

Fig. 3.8.5 (Opposite, top, right) Diagram by author. Diagram showing the sun's path changing throughout the year.

Fig. 3.8.6 (Opposite, middle, right) Diagram by author. Diagram showing a plan view of the arcs in Fig 3.8.5 forming three rings with a common centre.

Fig. 3.8.7 (Opposite, bottom, right) Photograph by author, 2026. Jade vessel used for ritual purposes, its surface is ornamented with three rings. Currently housed in the Shanghai Museum.



SEGMENT 09
The World Beyond
[山海之间]

Drawing, Artifacts & Mythical Inspirations

DRAWING INTENTIONS & MYTH SUMMARY

There is no specific myth associated with the final portion of the scroll. The drawing is a map of a mythical world after the creation of humanity and the world. Under the protection and guidance of the primordial gods, humanity has evolved, learning to understand and coexist with nature, to rely on it, and ultimately to use and "control" it. Armed with the divine lesson, humanity now has the survival skills required to begin its journey.

Because of the protection afforded by mountains and other natural barriers, the ancient Chinese believed they lived at the centre of the earth. Spanning from the centre of the segment to the four directions beyond are various conditions and dangers, loosely based on the Classic of Mountains and Seas.

***To the East** is the sea, deep, mysterious, and difficult to cross. The currents can drown anything, teeming with primordial beasts and serpents.*

***To the South**, the land is filled with fire and ruled by the venomous nine-headed snake and brutal savages.*

***To the West** is a desolate land of sand and dust, ruled by the lightning god and other ravaging beasts.*

***To the North** are towering frozen mountains made of ice and snow, home to a great human-faced 'candle' dragon [烛龙]. His mouth is the shape of a candle, lighting the shadowed heavenly gates [天门] in the north.*

***At the centre** is humanity. They may be growing stronger by the day, but they are still a feeble presence in a world of gods and monsters.*

Their story has just begun.[11]

11 中国 [*China*], season 3, episode 1, "创世 [*Creation*]," aired October 1, 2023, on Hunan TV.

SEGMENT 09
The World Beyond
[山海之间]

Drawing, Artifacts & Mythical Inspirations

DRAWING INTENT CONT'D

A combination of vertical stacking and moving viewpoint perspective is used to create the map-like composition of the final drawing segment. Natural elements and people do not change in size throughout the drawing; rather, elements overlap to create a sense of depth. Different climate and geographical conditions are shown simultaneously: snow in the north, fire in the south, deserts in the "west," and the open seas in the "east."

The northern area is farther from the walkway and is placed higher in the drawing, while the southern area sits near the bottom, closer to the viewer. Meanwhile, the eastern and western areas are swapped for compositional continuity.

The "eastern sea" fades into the left of the canvas. The lack of contour lines in the water creates an intentional blank that evokes the endless seas beyond the page. Although there is no shading in the drawing, the silk-textured background has a dream-like quality, conveying mists in the distance (at the top of the canvas) where there is no line work.

The southern and western areas use the level distance principle in Chinese landscape painting to emphasize the horizontal expanses of flat, open lands. The northern area uses the deep distance principle to denote depth through the layering of the mountain range and the high distance principle to suggest the majesty and verticality of the tallest peak (where the candle dragon resides).

SEGMENT 09: LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 3.9.1 (Page 97) Drawing by author. Drawing Segment 09, an enlarged segment of the final handscroll depicting the imagined land after the creation of humanity and the world.

04 CONCLUSION

"When a method of representation becomes habitual, when it has managed to thoroughly penetrate the culture that has chosen it and makes use of it, its resistance to change becomes greater."

- Massimo Scolari, *Oblique Drawing* [1]

The non-perspectives explored in this thesis and the final drawing exercise are a mere fraction of the innumerable ways space is perceived and presented around the world and throughout time.

The final speculative handscroll is the first iteration of this exercise and is a product of trial and error. Breaking a habit is difficult, especially in regard to something as ingrained as perception. Throughout the drawing process, there is an ever-present internal struggle between the complete deviation needed to achieve symbolic significance and the impulse to draw what "makes visual, logical sense."

The current drawing relies heavily on the "scattered perspective" and Hejduk's degree-zero axonometric view. Although there are subtle attempts at abstraction in the application of other non-perspectives, the drawing remains more "rational" than I intended.

---

1 Massimo Scolari, *Oblique Drawing: A History of the Anti-Perspective* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2012), 65.

Later iterations could push the imagination further and experiment with greater abstraction. As shown in the sketch in Figure 4.1, the world map in Segment 09 could become an unfolded view. Scenes in each nautical direction collapse towards the corresponding side of the page. The people in the middle are framed within the imagined boundaries of a map, and the natural elements spill out beyond the borders.



Fig. 4.1 (Top, left) Drawing by author. Second iteration sketch of Segment 9, where each area unfolds towards its corresponding nautical direction. East and West are correct in this iteration.

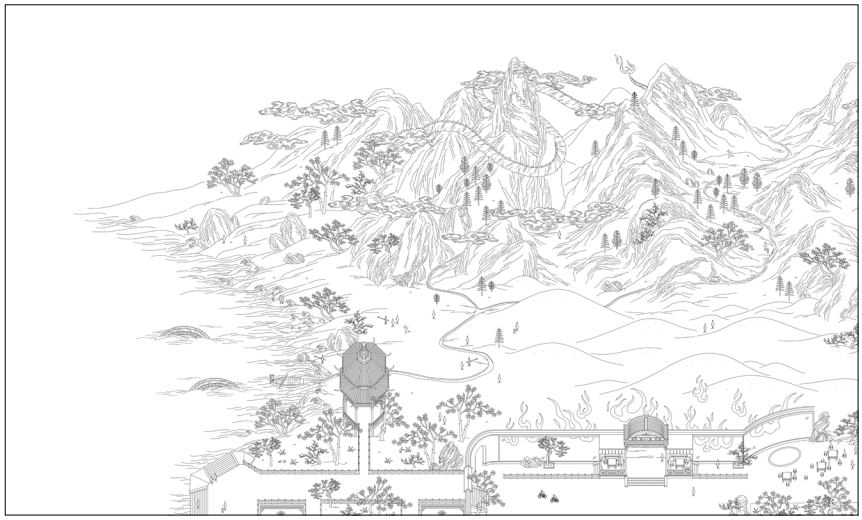


Fig. 4.2 (Bottom, left) Drawing by author. Segment 09 from the current speculative handscroll (linework) as comparison. East and West are flipped to ensure a continuous landscape.

A key feature of the drawing is its mix of digital and traditional hand-drawing. Although the line art is hand-drawn, duplicated elements and the consistent, uniform line work reflect a digital application. As such, there is a tension between digital and traditional expression in the drawing's viewing and production.

Due to time constraints and program familiarity, I chose Procreate and the iPad as the primary drawing tools for mobility and efficiency. However, the downside is the inability to draw on a continuous canvas at 1:1 scale at full resolution. Additionally, the iPad allowed me to zoom in to work on details but also forced me to draw within the screen's frame. I could not see the full drawing as one would in traditional art.

As the handscroll was digitally hand-drawn, I was immersed in the drawing process, but there was still a divide between myself and the handscroll. Mistakes are easily erased with the undo button rather than being used as thresholds for creative solutions or moments of spontaneity. Elements can be shifted quickly for better composition, rather than needing to be redrawn elsewhere.

Future iterations of the drawing could use vector-based applications such as Illustrator or switch to a pen tablet and digital drawing programs like Clip Studio Paint or PaintTool SAI. Alternatively, a more challenging and rewarding medium would be to experiment with purely traditional drawing methods. How would the drawing process and spatial thinking evolve and change through physical drawing?

Another experiment could utilize a work-in-progress method of traditional drawing to track changes. Areas that need to be modified are covered with a new layer of paper. As a result, the collage becomes a tactile, dimensional product that catalogues the spatio-temporal shift in design thinking during the drawing process. (See Figure 3.0.1).

A MOMENT OF WONDER

A handful of people, both within and outside of the architectural discipline, have seen the drawing during its conception. There were mixed reactions and feedback. Yet a key encounter sticks in my mind.

While I was working on the handscroll, someone came up to me and took a quick peek at the in-progress drawing.

As an aspiring artist and designer, the words, "*I think there's something off*," have never been so gratifying, truly music to my ears. In that moment I realized those words, coupled with the furrowed brows, embody the very reaction I wish to invoke with this thesis.

So, if there is even a notion of doubt as your eyes meander across the drawing, as you take in the strange structures and peculiar figures within the flowing landscape, then I feel I am heading in the right direction.



Fig. 4.3 (Left) Drawing by author. Doodle of author drawing the final handscroll draft.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allen, Stan. "John Hejduk's Axonometric Degree Zero." *Drawing Matter*. September 23, 2019. https://drawingmatter.org/john-hejduks-axonometric-degree-zero/.

Arnheim, Rudolf. *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

Barnhart, Richard, Yang Xin, Nie Chongzheng, James Cahill, Lang Shaojun and Hung Wu. *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Paintings*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1972.

Brown, Deidre."Maori Architecture - whare Marori." *The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*. Accessed January 11, 2026. https://teara.govt.nz/en/maori-architecture-whare-maori/print#:~:text=Meeting%20the%20meeting%20house.

Bruni, Giacomo. "Art Theory, Mountain and Water Painting: Why Mountain and Water Painting." *Shanshui*. September 1, 2020. https://www.shanshuiprojects.net/why-mountain-and-water-painting/.

Campbell, Joseph, perf. *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth*. Season 1, episode 3, "The First Storyteller." Aired June 23, 1988, on PBS.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Power of Myth with Bill Moyers*. Edited by Betty Sue Flowers. New York: Anchor Books, 1991.

Delbanco, Dawn. "Chinese Handscrolls." *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. April 1, 2008. https://www.metmuseum.org/essays/chinese-handscrolls.

Des Geus, Martjin. "China Projections." *Arch Daily*. March 9, 2019. https://www.archdaily.com/912723/china-projections.

Eidipour, Pegah. "Persian Miniature Painting." *World History Encyclopedia*. August 24, 2021. https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1811/persian-miniature-painting/.

Fan, Xiaolu and Rina Shukor. "Explaining the Beauty of Liu Bai in the Works of Ma Yuan, a Chinese Painter of the Southern Song Dynasty, with Taoist Thought." *Asian Journal of Research in Education and Social Sciences* 6, no. 3 (2024): 644-656. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/387263194.

Han, Byungchul. *Absence: On The Culture and Philosophy of the Far East*. Translated by Daniel Steuer. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2023.

Janson, Jonathan. "The History of Perspective." *Essential Vermeer*. Accessed January 12, 2026. https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/chhs/hd_chhs.htm.

Li, Sen. "Conceptual Transmutation and Landscape Perspective: A New Interpretation of "Scattered Perspective" in Comparative Visions of the East and the West." *Theoretical Studies in Literature and Art* 43, no. 6 (2023): 138-150. https://tsla.researchcommons.org/journal/vol43/iss6/16.

Liu, Yuqing. "A New Model in the Study of Chinese Mythology" Translated by Casey Lee. *Journal of Chinese Humanities* 3 (2017): 1-22. https://brill.com/view/journals/joch/3/1/article-p1_1.xml.

Motevalli, Sina and Ali Mohammad Nilforoushan. "From Canvas to Reality: Reinterpreting Iranian Miniature Perspective in Product Design through Cognitive Illusion." *Journal of Building and Architecture* 2 (2025): 1-6. https://www.academia.edu/24717736/.

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, "The World of Imagination and the Concept of Space in the Persian Miniature," *Islamic Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (1969): 129-134. https://www.academia.edu/24717736/.

Nyord, Rune. "Vision and Conceptualization in Ancient Egyptian Art." In *Sensuous Cognition: Explorations into Human Sentience: Imagination, (E)motion and Perception*, edited by Rosario Cabellero and Javier E. Diaz Vera, 135-167. Gottingen: De Gruyter Mouton, 2013.

"Oracle Bone Script (甲骨文)." *Smithsonian Institution: National Museum of Asian Art*. Accessed January 11, 2026, https://asia-archive.si.edu/learn/chinas-calligraphic-arts/oracle-bone-script/.

Pallasmaa, Juhani. *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*. 4th edition. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2024.

Pallasmaa, Juhani. *The Thinking Hand: Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2009.

Panofsky, Erwin. *Perspective as Symbolic Form*. Translated by Christopher S. Wood. New York: Urzone Inc, 1991.

Perez-Gomez, Alberto. "The Historical Context of Contemporary Architectural Representation." In *Persistent Modelling: Extending the Role of Architectural Representation*, edited by Phil Ayres, 13-25. New York: Routledge, 2012.

Pope, Arthur U. *An Introduction to Persian Art Since the Seventh Century A.D.* London: Peter Davies, 1930.

Ruta, Nicole, Alistair Burleigh and Robert Pepperell. “Space and Scale in Medieval Painting Reflects Imagination and Perception,” Gestalt Theory 44, no. 1-2 (2022): 61-78. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/365324027.

Scolari, Massimo. *Oblique Drawing: A History of Anti-Perspective*. Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2012.

Shotorban, Bagher B., Ali Asghar Fahimifar, Mohammad Ali Safoora, and Yoones A. Sekhavat. “Breaking the Frame in Traditional Persian Paintings, a Prelude to Remediation.” *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 21, no. 10 (2022): 1-21. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/364067107.

Wall, Alex. “OMA Conversations: Foreplay.” Interview by Richard Hall. *Drawing Matter*. November 22, 2021. https://drawingmatter.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/DM_RH_AW001_C24-1.pdf.

Wilkinson, Alix. “Symbolism and Design in Ancient Egyptian Gardens.” *Garden History* 22, no. 1 (1994): 1-17. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1586999.

Yan, Huan, and Haiyan Huang. “On Value Orientation in China and the West as Reflected in Man Creation by Nuwa and by the God.” *Creative Education*, no. 9 (2018): 2505-2515. https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2018.915189.

Yan, Zhizheng. “Research on the Scattered Perspective Viewing in the Era of Image.” Paper presented at 2019 5th International Conference on Economics, Management and Humanities Science, Bangkok, Thailand, March 2019.

Yuan, Ke. *Dragons and Dynasties: An Introduction to Chinese Mythology*. Selected and translated by Kim Echlin and Zhixiong Nie. England: Penguin Books, 1993.

Yuan, Ke. 山海经校注 [*The Classic of Mountains and Seas: A Collation and Connotation*]. Beijing: Jinghua Publishing House, 2014.

Yuan, Ke. 中国神话故事集 [*Collection of Chinese Mythological Stories*]. Beijing: 中国少年儿童新闻出版总社 [China Children’s Press & Publication Group], 2017.

Yuan, Ke. 中国神话史 [*History of Chinese Myth*]. Shanghai: 北京联合出版社公司 [Beijing United Publishing], 2015.

Yuan, Ke. 中国古代神话 [*Myths of Ancient China*]. Shanghai: 华东师范大学出版社 [East China Normal University Press], 2017.

Zhu, Zhiyi. “A Comparison of Perspective in Chinese and Western Traditional Painting and the Philosophical Thought behind It.” *Art and Design Review*, no. 12 (2024): 219-237. https://doi.org/10.4236/adr.2024.124015.

中国 [*China*]. Season 3, episode 1, “创世 [Creation].” Aired October 1, 2023, on Hunan TV.

考古公开课 (上集) [*Archeology Open Class (Part 1/2)*]. “昆仑之谜 [The Mystery of Kunlun].” Performed by 冯时 [Shi Feng] and hosted by 王筱磊 [Xiaolei Wang]. Aired May 9, 2024, on CCTV 10. https://tv.cctv.com/2024/05/09/VIDEwKxxlEzLlN2K7P0jzzHX240509.shtml.

考古公开课 (下集) [*Archeology Open Class (Part 2/2)*]. “昆仑之谜 [The Mystery of Kunlun].” Performed by 冯时 [Shi Feng] and hosted by 王筱磊 [Xiaolei Wang]. Aired May 16, 2024, on CCTV 10. https://tv.cctv.com/2024/05/27/VIDEq3lswAE3FU4Bg2DkMsmW240527.shtml.