

Preamble

In this work, I explore the complexities attached to interpreting the geographically mapped visual in early China, particularly with how geographical representations of space originated, what purposes they might have served, and what symbolic meanings they may have contained and communicated. Visually representing space is a way of understanding it, but the meanings of visual geographic representations – whether maps or landscape paintings – are not obvious. Perhaps because of the modern state’s emphasis on precise borders, with a correspondingly precise exercise of privileges and sanctions, there is a retrogressive application of this sensibility onto premodern civilizations, which, as James C. Scott has discussed in his *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, had no such precise notions.

And yet we can nevertheless assert that there was a notion of sovereignty in early China that applied to territorial expanses. The powers of the monarch, essential to any definition of early Chinese sovereignty, was exercised in a number of territorially expressive capacities – military, of course, but also legal, political, cultural, and ritual. Discussions of territorially expressive sovereign powers are not confined to, or defined by, the use of any one word or set of words in early China. This monograph focuses on how monarchial power was expressed territorially from various vantage points. My investigations pursue the designing of sovereign boundaries when borders were more zonal than linear definitions, when sovereignties would overlap, when the demands of a monarchial center competed with demands of other sovereign entities.

Though my analyses will draw upon and highlight salient structural patterns and observations from eras up to the Tang–Song, my temporal focus will be on the ancient historical epoch, from the Western Zhou to the Qin–Han era. Much of this early period is defined – as is common in studies of the ancient world – by the pockmarked availability of historical materials, as well as the uncertainty in their provenance and their political or rhetorical agenda. While I must acknowledge there are shortcomings of

2 Preamble

such an approach (one that many early China studies have), this investigation attempts to work around the uncertainties endemic to the ancient Chinese world by underscoring how a variety of its structural patterns are shared across ancient civilizations. Indeed, it is my hope that the shared similarities will facilitate a richer dialog that will more regularly include early China.

If borders in early China were more zonal than lineal, a concern central to the designation of boundaries would be how to square the use of lineal marks – such as walls or lines on a map – with such a conception. This problem is the focus of the initial sections of this study. I scrutinize how terrestrial space was conceptualized and represented in the ancient world, in its mensurative and, quite relatedly, aesthetic aspects. I commence with an analysis of the term *tu* 圖, most basically meaning “diagram” but commonly translated as “map.” Analysis of the term reveals its spatial function but does not conclusively determine its mensurative functionality. Indeed, it is not clear to what degree we can distinguish early “maps” from landscape art.

The discussion of early Chinese maps is naturally limited by the current scarcity of possible exemplars. Most scholarly evaluations of them focus on the several from Fangmatan and Mawangdui that seem to mark a relatively broad expanse of terrestrial space. It will be to these that much of my discussion of map exemplars will turn, though I will also refer to a few other examples from the early and middle imperial periods to expand on argumentative points. After a discussion of the level of mensurative accuracy likely for early Chinese maps, I proceed to discuss the aesthetic similarities between landscapes and early maps. To conclude the examination of the visual modeling of space, I pursue the question, parsing a lengthy anecdote in the Han historical record highlighting abusive terrestrial mapping, what it might have been for a premodern map to have been legible and thus functional, to whatever degree.

Unfortunately, as the Han example reveals, like other political documents, all early maps were highly vulnerable to distortion and misappropriation. Because of this, I then argue, a deeper sense of how sovereign terrestrial space was appropriated and defined better serves to explain the “mapping” of political sovereignty. The permission or denial of movement through space was a definitive marker of sovereignty. Symbolic markers of this phenomenon were those activities that asserted such permissions or denials. The remaining sections of this study then analyze symbolic markings of permission or denial from three perspectives – the internal marking of space through ritual activity and concepts; the regulation and prohibition of external intrusions through a sense of bounded

terrestrial space, the separation of inner from outer, and the characterization of uninvited penetration of sovereign space; and finally, the ritual regulation of the transgression of sovereign space, in the figure of the diplomat.

Although conceptualizations of terrestrial space and the designing of ancient borders have received significant attention in past work across a variety of languages, especially work focused on the classical Mediterranean world, we have yet to rectify the misapplication of modern lineal, scientific thinking to the early Chinese context. Scholars have frequently been very interested in determining exact locations drawn from texts and graphics. A few, such as Mark E. Lewis, have examined conceptions of space more broadly, but this study is the first, to my knowledge, that broaches the denotation of sovereign space head-on, from the internal, external and transgressive angles. A further fundamental aspect of this study is the contention that ritual permissions are a key indication of the extent of sovereignty. Contesting other more insistently secular readings of Chinese border negotiations, my contention is that ritual distinctions carried politico-legal weight. Indeed, I would hazard that to study ritual is to engage to some extent with law. It is in the application of legal – and thus, I argue, ritual – force that sovereignty is most clearly in evidence. To rename a ritual boundary, to insist on a supervenient spiritual organization, to prohibit or permit ritual activities is an essence in the claiming of sovereign power – the assertion of this power is not found in the simple placement of lineal marks, militarily reinforced or not. It is the aim of this study to show how carefully we must attend to more diurnal, even mundane activity, rather than explosive violent confrontation and its lines of engagement, to determine the limits of the sovereign realm.

1 The Basis of Ancient Borders

The marking of borders is primordial, defining the limits of habitat and control. Economic and political force finds its root in the divide, the fencing off of one area of control from another. Indeed, any sovereign border is most basically that which should not be transgressed without express permission, and thus is always a site of potential confrontation. A marked boundary may awaken a desire to conquer what lies beyond it, to expand the dominion one would claim, or tempt those outside to transgress, to challenge a dominion so explicitly asserted. Marking a border thus can generate concrete effects, even as it is an exercise in abstraction – an effort to conceptualize and create divisions in a physical landscape that are neither natural nor given. Dividing and bounding landscapes is now ubiquitous, but abstracting boundaries to mark possession and dominion occurred only gradually, with cultural sophistication and complexity, evolving with time and circumstance. Prior to the development of agriculture, settlement, and, more importantly, taxation, there would presumably be little need to carefully mark the edges of fields, to distinguish that which would be taxed from that which wouldn't. Analogously, prior to the rise of suzerainty there would be no need to precisely identify sovereign borders, or international borders prior to the rise of the nation-state. What I am trying to emphasize here is this: defining limits is requisite of the animal condition; how humans conceptualize and problematize a limit is complicated by the various circumstances in which we live.¹ What laying a boundary means and does, either materially or symbolically, will depend on complex contingent meanings present in a historical circumstance. Early Chinese conceptualizations of space, landscape, and boundaries had their own distinctive material and symbolic logic, a logic I here hope to articulate.

To understand what bounded terrestrial divisions signify requires probing into the very fundamentals of sociopolitical organization, of what

¹ Julian Reid, "Foucault on Clausewitz: Conceptualizing the Relationship Between War and Power," *Alternatives* 28 (2003), 5.

territorially associable power networks denote. Contemporary discussions of territorially associable networks are commonly tied to a notion of the “state.” According to the most common notions, the state is, as Carl Schmitt explained, “the political status of an organized people in an enclosed territorial unit,” with its borders being militarily, and at least somewhat precisely, delineated.² John Baines, writing about the early Chinese polities centered around Anyang and Erligang from an ancient Egyptian perspective, composed a somewhat similar definition, designating the state as that “in which a single culture predominates and fills its territory, defining itself to a great extent by its boundaries.”³ Yet critics charge that the very assertion of the state – and any substate networks – as a coherent object of historical analysis is debatable. According to Philip Abrams, the state “represents a fetishization of twentieth-century political ideology as deep metahistorical structure: ‘The state is at most a message of domination.’”⁴ In detailing the early Chinese state’s territorially associated apparatuses, we need to trace the structural *effects* “of detailed processes of spatial organization, temporal arrangement, functional specification, and supervision and surveillance.”⁵ When tracing these effects, we should ask how territorially penetrative were the state’s power structures?

In many respects, it seems, the penetration was inconsistent and vulnerable to local contestations, subversions, and rejections. According to James C. Scott, likely generalizing about non-Chinese state structures, the premodern state was “in many crucial respects, partially blind; it knew precious little about its subjects, their wealth, their landholdings and yields, their location, their very identity. It lacked anything like a detailed ‘map’ of its terrain and its people. It lacked, for the most part,

² Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 1.

³ John Baines, “Civilizations and Empires: A Perspective on Erligang from Early Egypt,” in *Art and Archaeology of the Erligang Civilization*, ed. Kyle Steinke (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 100. Cited in Haicheng Wang, “Western Zhou Despotism,” in *Ancient States and Infrastructural Power: Europe, Asia, and America*, ed. Clifford Ando and Seth Richardson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 110n37. Baines, writing about Erligang from the ancient Egyptian perspective, does not consider the earliest Chinese polities centered on Erlitou and Anyang to fit “easily with the concept of a territorial state.” At a later stage, the Anyang period, for instance, “offers a case of significant diversity in the culture of elites in a number of societies located within essentially the same region: although a single center may have predominated, it did not exercise exclusive political power or cultural hegemony.”

⁴ Cited in Adam T. Smith, *The Political Landscape: Constellations of Authority in Early Complex Polities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 97.

⁵ Timothy Mitchell, “The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics,” *American Political Science Review* 85, no. 1 (1991), 95; cited in A. Smith, *Political Landscape*, 97.

6 The Basis of Ancient Borders

a measure, a metric, that would allow it to ‘translate’ what it knew into a common standard necessary for a synoptic view.”⁶ Our current expectations about what the boundaries of a state *bound* – a unitary culture, a known people, a unit of coherent power or purpose – simply fail to account for how ancient bounded regions could and did operate.

Without anachronistic assumptions about how boundaries may work, it seems clear that territorial demarcations in political texts or visual images are assertions of possessive interest, whether aspirational or active. Thus when discussing and analyzing the measures of early Chinese territorial maps or textual descriptions of territory, it is important to keep firmly in mind that the basic definition of a politically sovereign administration or interest is not the line but the possibility of enforcement of politico-legal, or military, force. Territories are defined with reference to where sovereign authority structures can extend or reach, not by boundary marking itself. Employing Adam T. Smith’s condensed formulation, “Sovereignty refers to the establishment of a governmental apparatus as the final authority within a polity and therefore entails both the definition of a territorial extent beyond which commands go unenforced and unheeded and the integration of discrete locales into a singular political community.”⁷ Naomi Standen makes similar remarks in her study of tenth-century Chinese frontier life: “Tenth-century people seem not to have thought so much in terms of borderlines but rather organized themselves according to administrative centers and allegiances.” What counted at various levels of administration was not “where the borderlines lay (although these could always be calculated, and officials reported incursions across them), but where the official in charge placed his allegiance.” She continues

If the official in his county, prefectural, or provincial seat decided to change his allegiance – say, by surrendering his city to a military attacker – his action affected the whole of his district by virtue of the taxation records and administrative machinery housed in the city’s government offices. When an official did this, the borderline around the district at the next level up moved to place the surrendered district on its other side.

Thus, again, what most defines ancient boundaries is not a ruler’s asserting a crisp and militarized line but his success in securing the far more fungible acceptance of administrative force, or even an overlapping medley of forces.⁸

⁶ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 2.

⁷ A. Smith, *Political Landscape*, 155.

⁸ Naomi Standen, *Unbounded Loyalty: Frontier Crossings in Liao China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007), 23. Previously, Standen also explained that, in Five Dynasties and early Song maps, although the same area of “China proper” is marked in

Visualizing a space so bounded, principally through the use of maps, is itself an exercise of power and assignment of meaning.

Distinguished from the associations to state-enforced power, the visual horizon at its most epistemically basic provides a limit to what can be perceived and known. The horizon provided by a map is a limit of visually displayed knowledge.⁹ The relation between viewer and map is, in an abstract sense, bidirectional: the viewer looks at the map, but the map also “looks back” at the viewer, in that its fields of meaning, and their articulation, borrow from the viewer’s preconceptions of what a map can and should show. The reader of the map can actualize its content, the possibilities of travel and use, within the map.¹⁰ According to James Corner, in an active sense, “mappings are not transparent, neutral or passive devices of spatial measurement and description. They are instead extremely opaque, imaginative, operational instruments.”¹¹ The map is a spatial text embedded in a discursive process with its viewer, a text in the process of performance and creation, a process closer to an oral dialog than that of an active reader encountering a static textual product.¹² Furthermore, the reader’s distant viewership, not infrequently from above, allows for a type of panopticon effect, a viewership from both nowhere and everywhere, an anonymous assertion of force.

In an interview, Michel Foucault emphasized the military origins of a sovereign map, noting that Western spatial metaphors applied to the map are “equally geographic and strategic . . . The *region* of the geographers is the military region (from *regere*, to command), a *province* is a conquered territory (from *vincere*). *Field* evokes the battlefield.”¹³ For state purposes, a map is, in sum, a power discourse, but its use, as

part by the Wall, were a district within the Wall administered by a non-Chinese power, this, too, was clearly marked. “Hence although the Wall is there, it seems to function more as a point of reference than as a line to be held. It defines the limit of the empire as the Song cartographers wished the empire to be; *it did not have to reflect the limit as it actually was.*” Standen, *Unbounded Loyalty*, 22. Italics mine.

- ⁹ Michel Foucault, “Questions on Geography,” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 68.
- ¹⁰ “The eye can travel haphazardly over the surface of the map or follow plotted itineraries corresponding to particular destinations, seeking a piece of information or locating a place.” Christian Jacob, *The Sovereign Map: Theoretical Approaches to Cartography Throughout History*, trans. Tom Conley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 256.
- ¹¹ James Corner, “The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention,” in *Mappings*, ed. Denis E. Cosgrove (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 250.
- ¹² “During the sixth and fifth centuries BC [in the ancient Mediterranean world], one can see the origins of both a distinction and interaction between map and discourse. The map helped to gather, organize and unify a heterogeneous knowledge about places and tribes, but its purpose was also more abstract and theoretical.” Christian Jacob, “Mapping in the Mind,” in *Mappings*, ed. Denis E. Cosgrove (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 29.
- ¹³ Foucault, “Questions on Geography,” 69.

8 The Basis of Ancient Borders

Foucault acknowledges, extends far beyond the martial; indeed, its origins are just as rooted in economic, or even ritual, concerns as military. However, no matter what its use, the map requires the notion of a border, a boundary, the separation of one space from another, the marking of one point in relation to another, and their separate identity. If there are no such definitions, the map blanches.

A provisional definition of a map is an encoded graphic image that can be explained to some extent by text and is representative of functional relationships.¹⁴ But these functional relationships may not always, or even most powerfully, be secular. In the premodern world, the relationships portrayed on maps could have ritual or religious significances that impacted, or even were definitive of, governmental power structures. The ritual acknowledgment of dominance was not simply symbolic theater. In the case of Siam, for instance,

the notion that the realm was conceived as a sacred topography is evident in the terms denoting a kingdom or a sovereign territory. Literally, the term *anachak* means the sphere over which the king's *chak* – a sunlike disk representing sovereignty – could orbit. Another term, *khopkhanthasima*, literally means the sphere bounded by sanctuary stones. *Sima* or *sema* is the stone boundary marker of consecrated space, normally in a temple, within which an ordination can be performed. It also refers to stones of similar shape on the top of a city's wall. Thus a realm was said to be a sacred domain under the power of the king's wheel or a consecrated territory as within a sanctuary's *sim*.¹⁵

For Thongchai Winichakul, the sovereign map thus cannot be secularized. Neither its symbols nor even its bounding lines can be treated simply as indicating discrete, nonporous, nonoverlapping spaces of political hegemony. Indeed, as Winichakul makes abundantly clear in the arbitrations between British and Siamese over sovereign boundaries, Siamese officials could not accept the totalizing, fixed lines insisted upon by the British.¹⁶ Sovereignty, in the Siamese conception could not only overlap, it could be shared “not in terms of a divided sovereignty but rather a sovereignty of hierarchical layers.”¹⁷

Sensibilities similar to those Winichakul asserts for the Siamese polity also existed in ancient China. Sovereignty in early China was neither wholly secular nor was it unmixed. The ritually instantiated aspect of early Chinese sovereign boundaries was substantial and active, reinforced by the actions of inhabitants who, by acknowledging fealty to a sovereign

¹⁴ Jacques Bertin, *Semiology of Graphics*, trans. William J. Berg (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 11.

¹⁵ Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994), 24.

¹⁶ Winichakul, *Siam Mapped*, 35, 55, 63–80. ¹⁷ Winichakul, *Siam Mapped*, 88.

are acknowledging his legal–administrative oversight, as well as his moral force. A sovereign boundary was not defined by the inhabitants’ ethnicity – not whether one was Chinese or not – but by whether the sovereign figure was ritually, fiscally, and legally *a* lord over the territory – not necessarily the exclusive lord but at least a regular and substantial one. As proprietary enclosures for permitted activities and movements, boundaries were not ultimately or absolutely defined by concrete, static markers but by the activities of those counted as members of the realm. These “legalized” activities – to occupy, use, move through, contest, pray at, and so forth – were what mark boundaries. This ritually instantiated aspect is perceivable not only in the politically unstable hegemonic order between a dominant parent state and a subservient client state (*shuguo* 屬國) but also in the assertion and contestation over ritual structures within state boundaries and in those areas over which a state is newly asserting hegemonic status.

Conceptual Mapping in Imperial Rome

The notion of a bright line fixing the ancient border not only infiltrates current scholarship on the early Chinese cartographic consciousness, it also infects scholarship on a similarly potent ancient Western civilization, the Roman Empire. While I will not linger extensively on Rome, I will employ pertinent insights taken from various studies on it, and other ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern civilizations. My interest, as with my references to Siam, is to highlight structural patterns that have not yet been stressed sufficiently, or even observed, in early China scholarship.

According to Bradley Parker, contemporary scholars depict Roman borders, like their modern cousins, with solid lines or color contrasts. But the idea that Roman frontiers – with or without walls – functioned as clearly demarcated lines is vehemently contested.¹⁸ Another contested premise is that of the “natural” boundary, the expectation that the limits of ancient states and empires were set by geographic constraints “such as rivers or mountain ranges.”¹⁹ Strabo of Amaseia (63 BCE – ca. 21 CE) notes that sections of Parthian territory were held by Romans and phylarchs of the Arabs, “making a revealing comment about the role of the Euphrates river as the frontier between the Roman and Parthian empires”: “The boundary of Parthian power with the country opposite

¹⁸ Bradley J. Parker, “At the Edge of Empire: Conceptualizing Assyria’s Anatolian Frontier ca. 700 BC,” *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 21 (2002), 372.

¹⁹ Parker, “At the Edge of Empire,” 373.

10 The Basis of Ancient Borders

(i.e., the Roman Empire) is the Euphrates river. But parts within [Parthian territory] are held by the Romans and the phylarchs of the Arabs as far as Babylonia; some of them adhere more to the Parthians and others more to the Romans who are their neighbors.”²⁰ This passage from Strabo, Parker notes, is one of the “many oft-quoted examples from the Roman period used to illustrate that rivers served not as ‘natural’ boundaries but as corridors of transportation and communication,” and thus, I would add, potential upheaval.²¹

Not only is it doubtful that secular lines authoritatively served in making state borders, it is not even clear how truly three-dimensional early Roman cartographic thinking functionally was. A story in Suetonius’s *Lives of the Caesars* recounts Julius Caesar losing his way while on a trip in an area with which he was very familiar, a misapprehension that troubles scholars. Suetonius records that Caesar strangely lost his way in an area where, had he possessed any kind of conceptual map of the area, he should have been able to find his way: “It was not until after sunset that he set out very privily with a small company, taking the mules from a bakeshop hard by and harnessing them to a carriage; and when his lights went out and he lost his way, he was astray for some time, but at last found a guide at dawn and got back to the road on foot by narrow bypaths.”²² For Caesar, as perhaps for other early Romans, the “only limit is the mental image of where the road ended, since the road brought order to the unknown . . . Beyond the end of the route all was ‘deserted and nameless,’ says Arrian.”²³ The only names, the only markings that truly mattered, it seems, were those that the Romans themselves had instituted. The importance of names, and how they were devised and imposed, will be examined in a later chapter.

It appears that the road, and thus perhaps two-dimensional, directional thinking, was the means by which exploration was taken, both physically and conceptually. According to C. R. Whittaker, in the early Roman world, one of the rare recorded cases of conceptual exploration – that is, a pre-expedition conceptual mapping of an area to be entered, pursued

²⁰ Strabo 16.1.28, cited in Parker, “At the Edge of Empire,” 373.

²¹ Parker, “At the Edge of Empire,” 373.

²² Suetonius *Caes.* 31. See Suetonius, “The Deified Julius,” in *Lives of the Caesars*, vol. 1, *Julius. Augustus. Tiberius. Gaius. Caligula*, trans. J. C. Rolfe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), 77. Christian Jacob, in his “Mapping in the Mind,” states that: “As a matter of fact, Roman itineraries, in the areas familiar to the Romans, appeared as very exact.” This however renders the question of how Julius Caesar got lost even more perplexing. Jacob, “Mapping in the Mind,” 37.

²³ C. R. Whittaker, “Mental Maps: Seeing Like a Roman,” in *Thinking Like a Lawyer: Essays on Legal History and General History for John Crook on His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Paul McKechnie (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 107. Italics mine.