According to Charles Sanders Peirce, iconic representation can be divided into two types: images and diagrams. “Images” are characterized by the fact that many aspects of the signified can be found in the signifiers themselves, whereas “diagrams” are restrained to selected structural aspects of the signified.¹ No such distinction is possible for the traditional Chinese concept of tu 圖 and its practice which encompasses both: images and diagrams.² Yet, during a certain period of time (roughly from the Mid-Song to the Yuan Dynasty), a general tendency towards increasing rationalisation in various fields produced a phenomenon which came very close to the second type of iconic representation, the genuine diagram in the sense of Peirce. The diagrams discussed in this paper almost exclusively deal with textual analysis and/or the interpretation of phrases from the Classics and the sayings and writings of the founders of Daxue 道學, the Neo-Confucian school.

Although the period that witnessed the appearance of diagrams as tools for the visualisation of textual analysis was rather short-lived, a considerable amount of these tools is present in works of the Neo-Confucian school. This paper will mainly focus on Wang Bo’s 王柏 (1197–1274) Yanji tu 研幾圖 (‘Diagrams on the Fathoming of Initial Stages’),³ but I will also touch on a few other authors, such as Li Yuangang 李元綱 (fl. ca. 1172, author of the Shengmen shiye tu 聖門事業圖), and Xu Qian 許謙 (1270–1337, author of the Du Sishu congshuo 讀四書叢說, both BBCS ed.). Despite the fact that all of these authors and even some of their diagrams have been studied extensively,⁴ relatively few research has been dedicated to the formal aspects, interpretive strategies and implications of their diagrams.⁵ In

¹ May 1995.
² Reiter 1990.
this paper, I will therefore undertake, firstly, an inquiry into possible predecessors and models of the particular kind of *tu* I am dealing with here; secondly, a discussion of the possibilities diagrams offered for the interpretation of texts in contrast to linear argumentation; and, finally, some considerations on diagrams in comparative perspective.

I. MODELS AND INFLUENCES

Visualizing a text by means of one or more diagrams means to organize the text in an unusual, non-linear way. Although there is a number of earlier examples of non-linear arrangements of texts in pre-Song China, none of these examples can compare to the degree of sophistication represented by a diagram by Wang Bo (Fig. 1a) whose interpretation will be given later. Suffice it here to say that this diagram attempts, on the one hand, to give a grammatical and pragmatic analysis of a passage from the *Zhongyong* (§27, Fig. 1b), and, on the other hand, a semantic interpretation. In order to achieve this objective, a concomittance of many different technical factors was necessary. I propose to proceed in an ascending order, starting from the most direct and finishing with the more remote and general models and influential factors.

a) Buddhist *kewen*

One of the most influential and directly related models for *tu* as tools for textual analysis was the Buddhist *kewen* (科文 “exegetical texts”, used for teaching purposes; for an example see Fig. 2a); the diagram is organized according to stemmatic, i.e. arborescent principles with lines guiding the reader in various directions. In contrast to a merely linear reading, the *kewen* allows to illustrate the intertwining dependence of textual segments. Although most of the extant *kewen* come from a period much later than the Song (present example: Zhenjie 真誠 1589; but see also Fig. 2b, a *kewen* ascribed to Zongmi 宗密 [780–841]), it is generally assumed that the first *kewen* was produced by Dao’an 道安 (4th century). Of greater interest in our context is the fact that the diagram Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) used to illustrate his

Lackner 2000.