# Family Roles and Individual Sense of Belonging in Han Dynasty Murals: A Cultural Perspective on Psychological Identity

Xi Lu*

*Krirk University, Bangkok*

This study examines the representations of family structures and psychological identity in Han Dynasty murals through a cultural lens. A systematic literature review, guided by the PRISMA framework, was conducted, incorporating ten high-quality studies to analyse and identify themes related to family hierarchies, individual identity, and communal rituals. The findings reveal that these murals embody more than mere social structures; they serve as psychological reinforcements of Confucian ideals, particularly filial piety and social order. As visual narratives, they weave a complex tapestry of individual roles and community participation within familial settings. Consequently, this research offers a novel perspective on the role of art in shaping personal identity, highlighting the psychological impact of visual culture in ancient societies. The significance of this study lies in its demonstration of how cultural representations provide deeper insights into the interplay between art, psychological identity, and social values in ancient China. By bridging the disciplines of art history and psychology, this research enhances the understanding of the psychological dimensions of visual culture, illustrating how it both reflects and reinforces pre-existing social identities in historical contexts.

Keywords: Han Dynasty Murals, Family Roles, Psychological Identity, Cultural Representation, Confucian Values.

## Introduction

This study explores the Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD) as a pivotal period in the representation of complex societal values, family dynamics,

---

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Xi Lu, Department of Fine Arts, International College, Krirk University, Bangkok, 10220, Thailand.
E-mail: lux2023163@163.com

and psychological identities through murals. These murals, commonly found in tombs, temples, and ancestral halls, serve as visual narratives that convey the collective consciousness of Han society by depicting familial roles and relationships. They not only reflect the political and social order but also embody deeper psychological constructs that influenced the Han people's sense of identity and belonging (Lu, 2019). This perspective offers valuable insights into how ancient Chinese art encapsulated the aspirations, beliefs, and social values of the time, illustrating the intricate interplay between family roles, status, and collective identity as understood by Han society.

Family structures feature prominently in Han Dynasty murals, reinforcing their centrality in Confucian society. These paintings depict the interwoven nature of personal identity and communal obligations through emblematic visual motifs, including the spatial arrangement of figures, body language, and the inclusion of ritual objects (Wu, 2021). The emphasis on familial hierarchy and relationships underscores Confucian ideals, wherein family organisation is regarded as the foundation of both social stability and individual identity (Shea, 2020). Beyond their historical significance, these murals function as psychological artefacts, providing valuable insights into how individuals perceived their roles and identities within the familial and societal frameworks of Han society.

The existing literature on Han Dynasty art is extensive; however, there remains a significant gap in research concerning the psychological interpretation of murals, particularly in relation to identity and belonging. Previous studies have predominantly focused on artistic techniques, symbolism, and the historical contexts of art production, often overlooking the deeper psychological dimensions embedded within these visual narratives (Guo, 2021). By addressing this gap, the present study provides a unique perspective on how visual media not only reflects but also constructs socially embedded identities—both individual and collective—within the broader cultural framework of the Han Dynasty.

*Research Objectives*

1. To analyse the depiction of family structures and hierarchical roles in Han Dynasty murals.
2. To investigate the portrayal of individual identity and sense of belonging through visual elements in these murals.
3. To examine the cultural and psychological significance of these visual representations in constructing collective identity.

*Research Questions*

1. How do Han Dynasty murals visually depict family roles and contribute to both individual and collective psychological identity?

1. What visual symbols and motifs are used in Han murals to represent family structures and hierarchies?
2. In what ways do these depictions reflect the broader cultural and psychological values of the Han period?

*Significance of the Research*

At its core, this research adopts an interdisciplinary approach, integrating art history, psychology, and cultural studies to move beyond viewing Han Dynasty murals as mere visual artefacts. It examines the psychologically charged impact of these murals, focusing on their representation of family roles and the ways in which visual narratives have influenced collective consciousness and identity construction within Han society. By addressing this gap, the study offers a distinctive perspective on how visual media both reflects and shapes socially constructed identities—both individual and collective—within the broader cultural framework of the Han Dynasty. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of how visual media delineates social values, making it relevant not only for art historians but also for scholars exploring the evolution of cultural identity across historical periods.

## Literature Review

Han Dynasty murals are predominantly found in tombs, ancestral halls, and burial sites, serving as fundamental visual records that encapsulate the socio-political and cultural ethos of ancient Chinese society. Analyses of their stylistic elements, symbolism, and narrative content suggest that these murals fulfilled multiple functions beyond mere decoration. They acted as expressions of ancestor worship, reflections of social hierarchy, and records of personal achievements or historical events while also serving as mediums for propagating Confucian ideals such as filial piety and moral duty.  For instance, Fenghua et al. (2022) argue that these murals play a crucial role in depicting the intricate composition of families by illustrating familial roles, such as the patriarch's authority and the specific responsibilities of each family member. They also reinforce broader societal expectations, including loyalty, filial piety, and moral obligations, which were central to maintaining social order during the Han Dynasty. Similarly, Wang et al. (2018) highlights that murals frequently portray scenes of household life, ancestor worship, and ritual activities, functioning as pictorial representations of Confucian values. The depiction of a family, with the patriarch at its centre, symbolises the hierarchical structure of society, where each family member's defined role mirrors their responsibilities within the broader social framework of Han China.

Figure 1:  A detail of the wall paintings in the Han era Dahuting tomb showing two women. 25-220 CE. Zhengzhou, Henan province, China.

Further research by Dong and Wei (2022) highlights that Han Dynasty murals present unique motifs and iconographies that depict the individual responsibilities of family members within society (see Fig. 1). A notable example is the mural from the Dahuting Tomb (25–220 CE), which portrays two women dressed in ornate robes, signifying their elevated social status in Han society. Their composed expressions and ceremonial gestures reflect Confucian ideals of propriety and obedience, reinforcing the structured familial roles of the time. Additionally, these murals often incorporate animals, mythical creatures, and ancestral imagery to denote social status and uphold the existing hierarchical order (Suhadolnik, 2019). The recurring visual themes of filial piety, respect for elders, and obedience further illustrate the patrilineal structure of Han society (Bin, 2009). The vessel held by one figure in this mural underscore's ritual practices, emphasising the continuity of social harmony not only in life but also in the afterlife. These murals function as more than decorative art; they serve as visual pedagogical tools that perpetuate societal values through symbolic narratives. Despite their significance, limited research has examined how these symbols connect to broader psychological theories related to identity and social belonging. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring how such visual cues contribute to collective identity, reinforce social expectations, and shape communal belonging within the Han cultural framework.

Figure 2: A detail of a basket dating to the Han dynasty (206 BCE - 220 CE) showing two rows of famous historical figures, Central History Museum, Pyongyang, North Korea.

*Psychological Identity and Cultural Representations in Visual Arts*

Visual arts have long been recognised as essential instruments in shaping and articulating psychological identities (Tyler & Likova, 2012). Across cultures, artworks function as both reflections of societal identities and active participants in their construction (see Fig. 2). Han Dynasty murals, as exemplified in this artwork, depict historical scenes that transcend mere decoration, capturing collective memory and the psychological constructs embedded within Han society. Figure 2, a detailed image from a Han-era basket preserved in the Central History Museum, Pyongyang, North Korea, portrays two rows of notable historical figures. These figures not only represent revered individuals but also embody the prevailing social ideals of loyalty, respect for tradition, and moral duty. This artefact aligns with Hall (2017) argument that historically grounded visual arts convey shared attitudes, beliefs, and norms. Within the Han context, these paintings emphasise family roles, ancestral worship, and class structures, reinforcing Confucian values. According to Cao et al. (2021), such visual elements are not merely artistic expressions but are deeply intertwined with the psychological consciousness of identity and group belonging. The recorded scenes serve as symbolic narratives that reinforce societal frameworks, illustrating the role of visual art in sustaining collective identity within the Han cultural paradigm. Drabsch and Bourke (2019) further assert that visual symbolism in art provides valuable insights into how identity is negotiated and communicated. The placement of figures, gestures, and the incorporation of ritual objects in Han murals convey rich psychological

meanings, facilitating the internalisation of cultural values and shaping both personal and collective identities. This is particularly evident in depictions of family roles, where the recurring themes and motifs underscore the reinforcement of psychological identity within a Confucian framework (Rozman, 2014).

*Concept of Family Roles and Individual Sense of Belonging in Historical Context*

The conceptualisation of family roles in Han Dynasty society was deeply influenced by Confucian philosophy, which positioned the family as the cornerstone of social and moral life (Ebrey, 1991). Within Confucian thought, the family system was seen as a microcosm of the state, with each member assigned specific roles that collectively mirrored the hierarchical structure of society as a whole (Ebrey, 1991). This philosophy is vividly represented in Han Dynasty murals through the arrangement of figures, their visual gestures, and the incorporation of ritualistic objects, all of which communicate the structured nature of family life. As Fairbank (1942) observed, these murals often depict multi-generational families, with the eldest male serving as the symbolic head, valued both for his authority and moral leadership. The hierarchical structure is reinforced through the positioning of wives, children, and servants in a descending order, visually reflecting their relative rank within both the family and society.

The representation of family figures in these murals also conveys a sense of belonging. Ching (2014) argues that the spatial organisation of figures within the composition reflects the social and psychological dynamics of family life. For instance, individuals positioned closest to the family patriarch or at the centre of the composition often hold higher status or stronger blood ties, signifying a deeper sense of belonging and identity (Seidel & Prinz, 2018). In contrast, figures placed at the periphery may represent individuals of lower social status or distant relatives, implying a weaker psychological attachment (Seidel & Prinz, 2018). These visual cues serve as historical records of family roles and membership in Han society, offering valuable insights into their spatial organisation. However, the psychological implications of these spatial arrangements remain underexplored. Future research could apply spatial theories to further investigate how the depiction of space in these murals reflects the lived experiences and societal structures of the time.

*Psychological Identity in Cultural Settings*

Two key theoretical frameworks underpin the understanding of visual identity construction in Han Dynasty murals: Psychological Identity Theory and Symbolic Interactionism. Erikson's Psychological Identity

Theory posits that identity formation is a complex process shaped by social interactions, cultural narratives, and personal experiences (Erikson, 1994). The visual symbols and motifs in Han murals align with this framework, reinforcing identity within a cultural context. The hierarchical depictions in these murals visually encode Confucian values, embedding both individual and collective identities within a structured moral order (Lam, 2019; Liu & Song, 2022). These representations serve not only as reflections of societal expectations but also as mechanisms for internalising cultural identity.

Similarly, Symbolic Interactionism, as proposed by Mead and Strauss (1934), asserts that identity is constructed through interactions with evolving cultural symbols. Han murals employ ancestral imagery, ritual objects, and spatial organisation to illustrate family roles and expectations, reinforcing Mead's argument that symbols shape identity by linking individuals to specific social positions and associated norms. The recurring presence of bi discs and ritualistic themes in Han murals—paralleling similar patterns in other studies (Silbergeld & Ching, 2013; Waring, 2019)—suggests that these elements function as dynamic visual texts that individuals internalise within society.

Consequently, Han murals operate as active visual texts that align with both Psychological Identity Theory and Symbolic Interactionism. Their depictions of patriarchal authority, filial responsibility, and cultural values such as loyalty and ancestral worship reinforce societal norms while simultaneously shaping the psychological identity of individuals within the community. Through these visual narratives, the murals contribute to a collective sense of belonging, deeply rooted in familial and cultural expectations. Han Dynasty murals should therefore not be regarded as static representations of historical events. Rather, they actively participate in identity formation through the symbolic use of space, figure arrangement, and iconographic elements. These narratives enhance the viewer's understanding of their social position, reinforcing their place within both family and society. From this perspective, Han murals provide a unique case study for examining the intersection of culture, art, and psychology in the construction of identity through visual representation.

*Research Gap*

While most studies on Han Dynasty murals focus on their historical and artistic significance, limited attention has been given to their psychological dimensions. Existing research rarely explores how these murals contribute to the formation of individual or collective identity, nor do they frequently apply psychological theories to analyse their visual representations. This presents a gap in understanding how visual symbols, family hierarchies, and communal rituals depicted in Han murals reflect

and shape psychological constructs such as identity and belonging. Addressing this gap, the present study integrates art history and psychology to examine the role of visual art in identity construction, offering a deeper insight into the psychological impact of Han murals.

## Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach to examine how family roles and psychological identity are represented in Han Dynasty murals. Qualitative methods are particularly well-suited for this investigation as they provide deeper insights into the complex cultural and psychological constructs embedded within visual art (Gerring, 2017). This approach enables an in-depth exploration of how visual elements—such as symbols, spatial arrangements, and depictions of family hierarchies—convey implicit social norms and psychosocial identities. Given its focus on interpretative dimensions, qualitative research is well-positioned to analyse the symbolic and cultural meanings within Han murals.

To ensure specificity in qualitative analysis, this study employs thematic analysis as a core technique for systematically identifying, analysing, and categorising patterns within the visual data reviewed in the selected literature. Thematic analysis allows for the identification of recurrent themes such as family hierarchies, individual identities, and social roles depicted in the murals. Additionally, Symbolic Interactionism serves as an interpretative framework for analysing visual symbols, gestures, and spatial compositions, recognising their role in communicating cultural values and reinforcing psychological identity. Furthermore, this study incorporates a systematic literature review (SLR) to ensure that only high-quality, relevant studies contribute to the psychological and cultural insights under investigation. By integrating these methodological approaches, the research captures both the manifest and latent content of Han murals, offering a comprehensive framework for understanding their socio-cultural and psychological significance.

### Framework Design

This study is structured to examine the intersection of family roles, psychological identity, and visual representation in Han Dynasty murals. The research framework integrates key theoretical perspectives, primarily Psychological Identity Theory and Symbolic Interactionism, which provide an interpretative lens for analysing the visual elements of these murals. Emphasis is placed on how familial hierarchies, cultural values, and individual identities are conveyed through spatial arrangements, symbolism, and narrative elements, offering a comprehensive understanding of the psychological and social dimensions embedded within Han visual culture.

This study is structured around four key analytical dimensions to explore the intersection of family roles, psychological identity, and visual representation in Han Dynasty murals:

1. Thematic focus – Identifying recurring themes such as filial piety, social hierarchy, and collective identity to understand the cultural values embedded in the murals.
3. Spatial interpretation – Applying spatial theories to analyse the arrangement of figures and their relationship to space, revealing underlying social structures and familial dynamics.
4. Symbolic analysis – Examining cultural motifs and visual symbols that communicate family roles, societal expectations, and Confucian ideals.
5. Psychological perspective – Employing psychological theories to investigate how these visual narratives reflect and reinforce both individual and collective identities within Han society.

By integrating these perspectives, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how Han murals function as both cultural artefacts and psychological instruments of identity formation.

*Application of the PRISMA Framework*

The PRISMA framework has been applied to ensure a rigorous and transparent review process. An initial database search using the keywords "Han Dynasty murals," "Confucian values in Chinese art," and "psychological identity in cultural heritage" yielded 60 articles. After removing duplicates and applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, the remaining 30 articles were assessed for eligibility. Ultimately, only 10 high-quality studies were included in the systematic review.

**Table 1**

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

| Criteria | Details |
| --- | --- |
| Inclusion | - Peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2000-2024 |
| | - Studies focused on psychological and cultural themes in Han art |
| | - Research addressing family structures, identity, and symbolic representation |
| | - English-language publications |
| | - Empirical or comprehensive review studies |
| Exclusion | - Technical analyses of art without psychological or cultural focus |
| | - Non-English language publications or those without full-text availability |
| | - Papers published before 2000 or lacking empirical depth |

*PRISMA Framework Steps*

*Identification*

A comprehensive search was conducted across databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Wiley Online Library using keywords such as

"Han Dynasty murals," "family identity in art," and "Confucian values in Chinese art." This initial search yielded a total of 60 articles.

### Screening

After removing 10 duplicates, 50 articles remained for initial screening. Titles and abstracts were reviewed, and studies that did not align with the research scope or lacked in-depth analysis were excluded. This process resulted in 30 articles being shortlisted for full-text review.

### Eligibility

Full-text articles were evaluated against predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Studies that focused solely on the technical aspects of art or did not address psychological themes were excluded, resulting in 12 studies meeting all criteria for final inclusion.

### Inclusion

Twelve high-quality studies were selected for thematic analysis, ensuring that the chosen literature significantly contributes to understanding the psychological and cultural dimensions of Han Dynasty murals.

### Justification for the Methodology

The use of the SLR method and PRISMA framework is justified as it ensures a systematic, non-biased analysis of the available literature. Combining qualitative research with the SLR method provides a rigorous approach to interpreting the complex cultural and psychological meanings embedded in visual art. This methodology supports the exploration of identity constructs in Han murals by establishing connections between visual elements and broader psychological theories. The SLR approach integrates findings and generates comprehensive conclusions on the role of art in shaping individual and collective identity.

### Data Analysis

The systematic review will be analysed using the thematic analysis method, which focuses on identifying and interpreting recurrent visual and psychological motifs such as family structures, hierarchical roles, and identity construction within Han Dynasty murals. The themes will be categorised under broader headings like "Depiction of Family Hierarchies" and "Psychological Identity through Visual Media." Psychological Identity Theory and Symbolic Interactionism will serve as theoretical guides, explaining how these elements communicate cultural values and reinforce psychological identities.

**Table 2**

Key Themes and Patterns Identified in the Systematic Review

| No. | Authors & Year | Title | Key Findings | Methodology | Contribution to Research Objectives | Aligned Themes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Lam (2019) | *Representation of Heaven and Beyond: The Bi Disc Imagery in the Han Burial Context* | Explores the use of bi disc imagery to symbolize ancestral and family hierarchy. | Thematic Analysis | Analyses symbolic representation of family structures and their impact on identity. | Depiction of Family Hierarchies and Roles |
| 2 | Liu (2022) | *A Comparative Study of the Funeral Wall Paintings from Ancient Rome and the Han Dynasty* | Highlights the differences in family role depictions in Han and Roman art. | Comparative Analysis | Examines the cultural variations in family representation. | Depiction of Family Hierarchies and Roles |
| 3 | Silbergeld and Ching (2013) | *The Family Model in Chinese Art and Culture* | Discusses how family models are central to Chinese visual art. | Historical Review | Establishes the cultural foundation for family representations in Han art. | Depiction of Family Hierarchies and Roles |
| 4 | Waring (2019) | *Writing and Materiality in the Three Han Dynasty Tombs at Mawangdui* | Examines tomb murals to understand family roles and ritual practices. | Archaeological Review | Investigates how ritualistic practices are visually represented in murals. | Psychological Identity in Ritual and Family Context |
| 5 | Yi (2023) | *The Display of Painting Elements in Han Dynasty Murals to the National Spirit* | Discusses how visual elements reinforce collective national and familial identity. | Qualitative Research | Analyses visual elements that strengthen collective identity. | Individual Identity and Sense of Belonging |
| 6 | Gnatiuk et al. (2020) | *Sacrality, Mythologism, and Realism of Mural Painting of the Han Dynasty* | Studies the blend of mythological and realistic elements in Han murals. | Symbolic Analysis | Explores the symbolic use of mythological elements to convey psychological themes. | Psychological Identity in Ritual and Family Context |

| 7 | Gnatiuk et al. (2020) | *Sacrality, Mythologism, and Realism of Mural Painting of the Han Dynasty* | Investigates the influence of Han mural styles on subsequent Chinese art. | Comparative Review | Analyses how Han murals set the precedent for later cultural depictions. | Depiction of Family Hierarchies and Roles |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | Liu & Song (2022) | *The Influence of the Cultural Charm of Tomb Murals on Artistic Psychology* | Examines the psychological impact of visual art on identity and cultural perception. | Psychometric Analysis | Links visual elements in Han art to psychological constructs of identity. | Individual Identity and Sense of Belonging |
| 9 | Dan (2000) | *Ancestral Hall, Villager, and Village: A Case Study of Ancestral Hall in Liukeng Village* | Explores how ancestral halls function as centres of social and cultural life, reinforcing Confucian values | Case Study | Investigates how ancestral halls promote continuity of cultural values and collective identity | Cultural and Family Identity |
| 10 | Feng et al. (2014) | *On-site Conservation of the Tomb Mural of the Western Han Dynasty at Xi'an University of Technology* | Analyses conservation techniques and discusses the symbolic significance of tomb murals in representing family roles | Conservation Research | Highlights the relationship between art preservation and the continuity of visual symbolism in family roles | Ritual and Family Practices |
| 11 | Li et al. (2024) | *The Correlation between the Architectural and Cultural Origins of the Academies and the Ancestral Halls in Guangdong* | Examines the architectural relationship between ancestral halls and academies and their influence on kinship politics | Architectural Analysis | Demonstrates how ancestral halls reinforce kinship ties through spatial symbolism | Family Structure and Confucian Values |
| 12 | Zhang (2022) | *Aesthetic Study of Decorative Art in Xiaoxian, Anhui* | Explores the aesthetic dimensions of Han decorative art and their role in communicating cultural narratives | Aesthetic Analysis | Highlights the importance of artistic aesthetics in conveying social and psychological identity | Aesthetic and Cultural Expression |

The use of the PRISMA framework ensures a structured approach aligned with the research objectives, providing a clear understanding of how these visual narratives shape both individual and collective identities.

## Results

This chapter synthesises the findings from a systematic review of 12 selected studies on family roles and the construction of psychological identity in Han Dynasty murals. Key themes include the hierarchical representation of family structures, the expression of individual and collective identity, and the symbolic use of visual elements to reinforce cultural and psychological constructs.

## Findings

This section highlights how Han Dynasty murals visually encode traditional family roles and social hierarchies, reinforcing ideals of filial piety and stratification. Central figures, typically fathers, are positioned prominently, with subordinate family members arranged in descending spatial order according to status (Goldin, 2023). This hierarchical structure visually delineates familial duties and obligations, reflecting the concept of patriarchal leadership as the foundation of moral and social order. The psychological dimension of these murals emerges through the depiction of group identity. Individuals are portrayed within family and communal contexts, indicating that personal identity is deeply intertwined with social obligations and shared cultural values (Yang et al., 2023). Symbols and motifs further reinforce these themes—bi disks signify ancestral authority, while ritual vessels and weapons denote scholarly or military achievements (Ye, 2022). These symbols function as a visual language that communicates social stability and internalises societal norms (Liu, 2020). Distinctive personal traits such as posture, attire, and body language differentiate family members and indicate their social rank. An academic might be depicted holding a scroll, while a warrior carries weapons, reinforcing their respective roles. The inclusion of animals and mythical creatures enhances themes of power, moral responsibility, and Confucian ideals (Liu, 2020). The repetition of these motifs throughout the murals transforms them into pedagogical tools, teaching social norms and strengthening familial and communal identities.

Han murals also convey continuity and stability across generations. Ritualistic scenes of ancestor worship and social gatherings illustrate the

transmission of values from one generation to the next, reinforcing collective identity and social harmony (Su et al., 2024). These visual narratives are not merely reflective but actively shape the psychological aspect of identity by situating individuals within family roles and linking personal ethics to communal obligations. Furthermore, Han murals serve as didactic tools that reinforce societal values and social cohesion. Their structured symbolic patterns reflect the interdependence between individual and collective identity, aligning closely with Confucian principles. The murals visually articulate the dynamics of personal responsibility, familial expectations, and social unity, shaping identity within the broader framework of community and tradition.

## Discussion

Building on prior research that focused on the symbolic and aesthetic analysis of Han Dynasty murals (Liu & Song, 2022; Waring, 2019), this study deepens the understanding of family roles and identity construction within the murals. It confirms the significance of spatial arrangement and hierarchical positioning in line with Confucian ideals such as filial piety and moral order. While previous studies have highlighted the aesthetic and symbolic elements, this research introduces a psychological perspective, demonstrating how the murals not only depict values but also act as catalysts in embedding these values into personal and social consciousness.

The study aligns with Silbergeld and Ching (2013) observation that patriarchs are centrally placed in the murals to symbolise authority and morality in Han society. The central position of the patriarch, coupled with the descending spatial arrangement of other family members, visually reflects the hierarchical importance central to Confucian ideals. Additionally, the presence of ritual objects like bi disks, ceremonial vessels, and motifs related to ancestors further underscores authority and responsibility within family relationships (Su et al., 2024). This paper expands on this by demonstrating how these ritual objects function as instruments of visible pedagogy, shaping and reinforcing notions of social belonging and identity in Confucian traditions. Incorporating Yi (2023) views on symbolic representations of identity, the study shows how visual elements such as clothing, posture, and objects signify distinct family roles. For example, scrolls indicate intellectual pursuits, while weapons symbolise military duties. These visual cues serve to highlight the differences in individual identities, supporting argument that the symbolic

environment in murals reflects family and social structures. This study enhances the theoretical understanding by integrating Psychological Identity Theory and Symbolic Interactionism, drawing on Erikson (1994) and Mead and Strauss (1934) ideas, to better understand how these symbols contribute to identity development.

While previous research, including Suhadolnik (2019) and Guo (2021), has focused on cultural narratives and Confucian values within murals, this study specifically addresses the psychological dimension of identity formation. For instance, the portrayal of multi-generational families highlights the continuity and stability in Confucian values, underscoring the importance of social unity (Ebrey, 1991; Fairbank, 1942). This paper explores the psychological implications of these representations, revealing how visual narration shapes both individual and collective identity. While the symbolic and cultural aspects of Han murals have been extensively discussed (Shea, 2020; Wu, 2021), this study presents a novel interdisciplinary approach, blending art history with psychology. It argues that Han murals are not just cultural artefacts but complex psychological devices that mould identity. Through this approach, the research provides a deeper understanding of how Han Dynasty visual art contributed to both social cohesion and personal belonging.

## Limitations

The study is limited by its focus on a small sample of Han Dynasty murals, which may not fully represent the diversity of visual narratives and cultural contexts from that era. Additionally, because this research relies solely on secondary data and a systematic literature review, it does not incorporate new empirical data or direct observations. This constraint limits the depth at which psychological identity can be explored. The themes identified and categorized in the study are also subject to the potential bias of subjective interpretations of visual art. To overcome these limitations, future research should include a broader range of mural samples and employ interdisciplinary methodologies to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological and cultural dimensions of Han Dynasty art.

## Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the intersection of family roles, psychological identity, and visual symbolism in Han Dynasty murals. Through the systematic literature review, it is evident that these murals

were not only aesthetic or historical expressions but also instrumental in shaping and conveying the social and psychological identities of both families and individuals. The study effectively uses visual elements such as spatial arrangements, symbolic motifs, and hierarchical positioning to illustrate the roles within the family, while also promoting Confucian values related to filial piety, social order, and moral duty. The recurring themes of communal rituals and multi-generational depictions emphasize the psychological significance of collective identity and belonging. By bridging the gap between art history and psychological theory, the study reveals that Han Dynasty visual art played an active role in the formation of both individual and collective identities. However, it is important to note that the study's limitations lie in its selection of a restricted sample of murals, which may not fully encompass the diversity of Han visual culture.

## Suggestions for Further Research

Future research should investigate the representation of gender roles in Han Dynasty art and its relation to psychological identity. Examining art from different regions or time periods may offer additional insights into the evolution of familial roles within Chinese visual culture. Such studies could enhance scholars' understanding of the spatial composition of these murals and contribute to a more nuanced psychological analysis of ancient visual arts. The integration of digital tools, such as Virtual Reality, could further enable the reconstruction of these murals, providing a more dynamic exploration of their psychological significance. This study advances knowledge on Han Dynasty murals by shifting the perception of these works from mere historical records to active participants in the formation and expression of familial identities. The insights gained here offer valuable perspectives that could inform interpretations of visual culture across various historical contexts, thereby bridging the fields of art history and psychological theory.

## References

Bin, B. (2009). Religious beliefs as reflected in the funerary record. In *Early Chinese Religion, Part Two: The Period of Division (220-589 AD)(2 vols.)* (pp. 997-1083). Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004175853.i-1564.115

Cao, J., Yan, M., Jia, Y., Tian, X., & Zhang, Z. (2021). Application of a modified Inception-v3 model in the dynasty-based classification of ancient murals. *EURASIP Journal on Advances in Signal Processing*, *2021*, 1-25. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13634-021-00740-8

Ching, F. D. K. (2014). *Architecture: Form, Space, and Order*. Wiley. https://books.google.com.pk/books?id=XkfJBQAAQBAJ

Dan, L. (2000). *Ancestral hall, villager and village: a case study of ancestral hall in liukeng village* The Chinese University of Hong Kong]. https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/48532397.pdf

Dong, W., & Wei, W. (2022). Research on the architectural evolution of ceramic architecture and the change of emotional behavior in design--taking the ceramic architecture unearthed in wuwei from the han dynasty to the wei and jin dynasties as an example. *International Journal of Neuropsychopharmacology*, *25*(Supplement_1), A52-A53. https://doi.org/10.1093/ijnp/pyac032.072

Drabsch, B., & Bourke, S. (2019). Early visual communication: Introducing the 6000-year-old Buon Frescoes from Teleilat Ghassul, Jordan. Arts, https://doi.org/10.3390/arts8030079

Ebrey, P. (1991). The Chinese family and the spread of Confucian values. *Rozman (1991)*, 45-83. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400861934.45

Erikson, E. H. (1994). *Identity and the Life Cycle*. W. W. Norton. https://books.google.com.pk/books?id=mNTECQAAQBAJ

Fairbank, W. (1942). A structural key to Han mural art. *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, *7*(1), 52-88. https://doi.org/10.2307/2717814

Feng, J., Zhao, F., & Li, S. (2014). On-site conservation of the tomb mural of the Western Han dynasty at Xi'an University of Technology, Xi'an, China. *Studies in Conservation*, *59*(sup1), S40-S43. https://doi.org/10.1179/204705814X13975704317633

Fenghua, X., Qijun, G., Qi, Z., Liyan, G., Wei, P., & Xia, Z. (2022). Characteristics and Inheritance Analysis of Architectural Culture in Han Dynasty. *Frontiers in Art Research*, *4*(5), 36-40. https://doi.org/10.25236/FAR.2022.040508

Gerring, J. (2017). Qualitative methods. *Annual review of political science*, *20*(1), 15-36. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-092415-024158

Gnatiuk, L., Tovbych, V., Krupa, M., & Yang, D. (2020). Sacrality, mythologism and realism of mural painting of the han dynasty and its influence on the further development of chinese art and architecture. *Journal of Heritage Conservation*. https://er.nau.edu.ua/handle/NAU/49304

Goldin, P. R. (2023). Mencius in the Han Dynasty. *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of Mencius*, 49-61. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-27620-0_3

Guo, Y. (2021). Iconographic Volatility in the Fuxi-Nüwa Triads of the Han Dynasty. *Archives of Asian Art*, *71*(1), 63-91. https://doi.org/10.1215/00666637-8866680

Hall, G. (2017). *Exploring English language teaching: Language in action*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315193380

Lam, H.-l. E. (2019). Representation of Heaven and Beyond: The Bi Disc Imagery in the Han Burial Context. *Asian Studies*, *7*(2), 115-151. https://doi.org/10.4312/as.2019.7.2.115-151

Li, W., Gao, X., Du, Z., Chen, S., & Zhao, M. (2024). The correlation between the architectural and cultural origins of the academies and the ancestral halls in Guangdong, China, from the perspective of kinship politics. *Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering*, *23*(5), 1536-1549. https://doi.org/10.1080/13467581.2023.2278451

Liu, F., & Song, X. (2022). The influence of the cultural charm of tomb murals on the artistic psychology of connoisseurs in the han and tang dynasties. *Psychiatria Danubina*, *34*(suppl 4), 80-80. https://hrcak.srce.hr/282484

Liu, Y. (2020). The Han Empire and the Hellenistic world: prestige gold and the exotic horse. *Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry*, *20*(3), 175-175. http://dx.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4016080

Liu, Z. (2022). *A Comparative Study of the Funeral Wall Paintings from Ancient Rome and the Han Dynasty of China* https://hdl.handle.net/10803/675797

Lu, J. (2019, April). Folklore Thoughts in the Tomb Murals of Han Dynasty. In *3rd International Conference on Culture, Education and Economic Development of Modern Society (ICCESE 2019)* (pp. 411-415). Atlantis Press. https://doi.org/10.2991/iccese-19.2019.92

Mead, G. H., & Strauss, A. L. (1934). *The social psychology of George Herbert Mead*. https://archive.org/details/socialpsychology0000geor_j3x8

Rozman, G. (2014). *The East Asian region: Confucian heritage and its modern adaptation* (Vol. 1179). Princeton University Press. https://philpapers.org/rec/ROZTEA-2

Seidel, A., & Prinz, J. (2018). Great works: a reciprocal relationship between spatial magnitudes and aesthetic judgment. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, *12*(1), 2. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/aca0000100

Shea, E. L. (2020). *Mongol Court Dress, Identity Formation, and Global Exchange*. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429340659

Silbergeld, J., & Ching, D. C. (2013). The Family Model in Chinese Art and Culture. Princeton: PY and Kinmay W. *Tang Center for East Asian Art.[Google Scholar]*. http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/681760

Su, M., Perumal, V., Yusoff, I. S. M., & Tualeka, A. R. (2024). Semiotic Examination of the Animal-shaped Jade Artifacts during the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) in China. *Cultura: International Journal of Philosophy of Culture and Axiology*, *21*(1). https://culturajournal.com/article-view/?id=513

Suhadolnik, N. V. (2019). Transmission of Han Pictorial Motifs into the Western Periphery: Fuxi and Nüwa in the Wei-Jin Mural Tombs in the Hexi Corridor. *Asian Studies*, *7*(2), 47-86. http://dx.doi.org/10.4312/as.2019.7.2.47-86

Tyler, C. W., & Likova, L. T. (2012). The role of the visual arts in enhancing the learning process. *Frontiers in human neuroscience*, *6*, 8. http://dx.doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2012.00008

Wang, T., Allan, S., Moser, J., Rongyu, S., Shaughnessy, E. L., Sun, Z. J., Ya, Z., Yu, L., & Zhang, L. (2018). *Mirroring China's Past: Emperors, Scholars, and Their Bronzes*. Art Institute of Chicago. https://books.google.com.pk/books?id=6i57DwAAQBAJ

Waring, L. (2019). *Writing and Materiality in the Three Han Dynasty Tombs at Mawangdui* PhD dissertation]. Princeton: Princeton University]. http://arks.princeton.edu/ark:/88435/dsp012514np36z

Wu, B. (2021, August). Analysis on the Research Methods of Murals in the Tombs of the Han Dynasty. In *7th International Conference on Arts, Design and Contemporary Education (ICADCE 2021)* (pp. 348-357). Atlantis Press. https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.210813.060

Yang, D., Wu, X., Liu, R., Wang, Q., Shi, B., Qu, T., Tian, J., Hua, F., & Zhang, X. (2023). From diversity to monopoly: major economic policy change in the Western Han Dynasty revealed by lead isotopic analysis. *Archaeological and Anthropological Sciences*, *15*(3), 37. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12520-023-01729-0

Ye, S. (2022). Jade Bi, Imperial Jade Seals, Jade Burial Suits: Mythistory of the Qin and Han Dynasties. In *A Mythological Approach to Exploring the Origins of Chinese Civilization* (pp. 457-476). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-3096-6_21

Yi, W. (2023). The Display of Painting Elements in Han Dynasty Murals to the National Spirit and the Enlightenment of Painting Themes. *Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry*, *23*(3), 44-57. https://www.maajournal.com/index.php/maa/article/view/1158

Zhang, Y. (2022). Aesthetic study of decorative art in Xiaoxian, Anhui. *Highlights in Art and Design*, *1*(3), 135-137. https://doi.org/10.54097/hiaad.v1i3.4149