

Book Review

Heaven and Earth, Album Leaves from a Ming Encyclopedia, selected and annotated by John A. Goodall. Shambhala Publications Inc., Boulder, Colorado, 1979. US\$39.50.

HEAVEN AND EARTH

Album Leaves from a Ming Encyclopedia

SELECTED BY JOHN A. GOODALL



Book illustration is one of the less studied aspects of Chinese art. The work of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the wake of the rise of the novel and drama will perhaps be most familiar to the reader. Less well known, however, may be the illustrations to encyclopedias and pharmaceutical and other technical works, among which the encyclopedia entitled the *San zai tu hui*, 'Tripartite Picture Arrangement', is one of the most profusely illustrated.

The *San zai tu hui* was published around 1610 at a time of intense scholarly interest in the past, which had another expression in the paintings of Dong Qichang and his followers. This interest, and others more contemporary, are well represented in the illustrations to the encyclopedia. They include pictures of all the Chinese emperors, games, tools, clothing, buildings, precious stones, ceremonies and the human body, as

well as the subjects included in this selection of 120 plates — the heavenly powers, spiritual animals and fabled races, flora, fauna and the leisure activities of scholars. These illustrations were partly culled from earlier books, partly the compiler's own, and many were in turn reused in the later and better-known encyclopedia, the *Gu jin tu shu ji cheng*.

It is the subject-matter which most interests the author, each plate serving as the starting point for an iconographic study. One large group of subjects relates to earlier mythology and religion as known from such early texts as the *Shan hai jing*, which, as part of the same interest in the past, was provided in the seventeenth century with a new set of illustrations closely comparable with those of the *San zai tu hui*. Mr Goodall wishes to relate these Ming illustrations to ancient illustrations of similar subjects to which there now exist only literary references. Those of the encyclopedia, he argues, belong to a tradition leading back to a Han or earlier archetype, 'the conclusion to which one is led by the Chu silk manuscript with its isolated figures and the absence of any real tradition of landscape pictures under the Han'. A more plausible explanation would be that the isolation of figures suited the scientific spirit of the encyclopedia. It is likely on the present evidence that the original images of the spirits had in the course of time been replaced by literary descriptions, and it was to these that the Ming woodcut artists turned afresh.

With a second main group, of zoological and botanical subjects, the author is mainly concerned with symbolism. Some of the illustrations, however, may derive from pharmaceutical books and are purely informative. The choice of evidence here as elsewhere is rather eclectic, but perhaps understandably so in view of the limited Western language material to which the author was largely restricted. The illustrations of scholars engaged in such cultivated activities as gazing at the moon are debased versions of themes long standard in painting, as are many of the more common zoological and botanical subjects. The author argues

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that these representations could serve as models for painting in their supposed original function as illustrations to drawing books, but the quality of certain of them — the scholars, for instance — speaks against this.

The woodcuts transfer well to modern reproduction, the generous scale allowed by restriction to one plate per page, making for a visually very pleasing book. The translations from Chinese by Graham Hutt are excellent and the text is full of interesting, if not always strictly relevant information. A long and varied bibliography will point the still curious reader in the many directions suggested by the illustrations and brought out in the text by Mr Goodall.

Jonathan Hay

The theme of writing an inscription on a cliff as rendered in the *San zai tu hui*, published c. 1610, and on a blue-and-white porcelain bowl dated to the 1640s. Many subjects on Transitional wares were derived from contemporary book illustrations.

