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Julia K. Murray, *Mirror of Morality: Chinese Narrative Illustration and Confucian Ideology*, Honolulu : University of Hawai'i, 2007. 194 pages, 101 fig.

In 1539, two Ming officials, Huo Tao 霍韜 (1487-1540) and Zou Shouyi 鄒守益 (1491-1562) voiced the following sentiments in their memorial accompanying the offering of the illustrated narrative text *Pictures of Sagely Merit* (*Shengong tu* 聖功圖) to the Jiajing emperor (r. 1521- 1567): “We hope that the sage emperor will glance at it and say whether our painted picture-album will have some slight usefulness as a means of making the heir apparent into a sage” (p. 120). Given Jiajing’s long, tyrannical and quite un-sage like reign it seems that Huo and Zou must have inevitably been disappointed. Julia K. Murray’s *Mirror of Morality: Chinese Narrative Illustration and Confucian Ideology* is grounded in the premise that pictorial art and images with Confucian themes produced outside the literati canon of Song and post-Song aesthetic discourse which, though lacking the critical imprimatur of this culturally determining elite could, and did, promote the values and ethos, social and personal morals, individual behaviour, and attitudes to governance and education of the ruling Confucian elite. Murray argues, as we have seen in the example above, that contrary to the established thinking of post-Song critical discourse among the literati, which held that narrative images were only for “stupid men and women” (*yufu yufu* 愚夫愚婦), illustrated narrative texts after the eleventh-century C.E. continued to find readerships and proponents throughout all social strata in imperial China, even at the imperial court and among the ruling elite. In addition, Murray’s contention is that narrative illustration continued to play a vital role in shaping and expressing elite visual culture with illustrated texts existing not only to promote desired conduct, personal cultivation, social harmony, adherence to Confucian values, and good governance, but also to serve as admonitory warnings illustrating the consequences of failing to heed the examples portrayed, even after literati criti-

cal interest and regard shifted away from objective narrative modes toward a more subjective, and expressive pictorial aesthetic. The author states that her main purpose is to “examine how certain sectors of elite society used narrative illustration in support of Confucian values, and to demonstrate that they were not delegitimized by the rise of the ‘literati aesthetic’” (p. 5). This is supported through well chosen and frequently fascinating contemporaneous and later analyses, statements, rhetorical accounts and observations drawn from memorials to the throne, painting colophons, prefaces and other paratextual elements associated with narrative and pictorial texts to provide specific historical contexts.

Although Murray draws on the comments and writings of Chinese critics and observers, she also highlights the deficit found in contemporary critical research of useful definitions for dealing with Chinese narrative illustration, in contrast to fields such as film and literature which have received much greater critical attention to their narrative structures. Murray very effectively sets out the critical and interdisciplinary underpinning of her research with a clearly elucidated survey of existing scholarship in the field of pictorial and literary narrative at the very outset. Thus equipped the reader is effectively prepared for the more detailed analysis of the paintings, painted albums, and printed pictorial texts to follow in succeeding chapters.

The early chapters provide the reader with a very useful overview of the development and role of narrative illustration in China from Qin to Song, while the latter half of the book more closely examines the role of individual texts from the Song and later. Beginning with pre-Buddhist narrative illustration; that is pictorial compositions of a predominantly monoscenic nature where scenes are depicted in a concise and abbreviated mode, which anticipated the viewers’ foreknowledge of the narrative depicted, Murray then considers how this indigenous model of narrative depiction received considerable stimulus with the post-Han introduction of Buddhism which brought with it new modes of pictorial depiction and storytelling. The author demonstrates how the more complex modes of representation which Buddhism brought with it provided artists with the impetus to develop new and more sophisticated multi-scene compositional structures, to utilize new formats, notably the handscroll, and to develop new conceptual approaches. Murray maintains that the development of the handscroll as an artistic format, imbued with new narrative possibilities, together with the increased emphasis on attributions of authorship led to the emergence of individual painting styles and of identifiable painting

masters known by name and reputation. The development of narrative painting under the Tang, particularly within the framework of imperial patronage, marked another major evolution in the development of narrative illustration. The reunification of China under the Tang ushered in a period of political consolidation and with it greater promotion of Confucian conceptions of state. The official patronage provided by the Tang emperors, seen in later dynasties as the template for imperial patronage, and its role in fostering influential figurative painters such as Yan Liben 閻立本 (d. 673) and Wu Daozi 吳道子 (c. 689-after 755). Murray singles out these two painters for the two distinctive modes of figurative painting which they developed which in turn led to two formal modes of painting which later artists could draw upon: Yan Liben's carefully descriptive 'Objective Mode' of documentary painting, and Wu Daozi's more dynamic, calligraphic 'Expressionist Mode'. Yan Liben's style in particular came to be associated with projection of Confucian and state moral authority, while Wu Daozi's ink monochrome, outline painting (*baimiao* 白描) anticipated the illustrations that were to feature in woodblock printed books over the coming centuries. Murray then charts the influence of the renowned Song master of the *baimiao* technique, Li Gonglin 李公麟 (1049-1106) and his narrative painting amid rapidly changing painting genres: the importance of landscape painting increasingly ascendant in literati culture in contrast to the waning critical interest in the figurative mode. Murray points not only to Li Gonglin's importance in developing the *baimiao* painting mode, but also the later influence of his work on woodblock printed illustration.

Much of the body of material which Murray addresses in this study has not previously been the subject of scholarly attention and it is these lesser known works which provide the basis for the case studies which comprise the latter half of the book. Elite patronage and reception of these texts during the Ming and Qing dynasties challenges many of the accepted typical representations and conventions of elite culture. Among the examples of Ming pictorial texts on which Murray focuses are the *Pictures of Sagely Merit* (*Shenggong Tu*) of 1495; the *The Emperor's Mirror, Illustrated and Discussed* (*Dijian Tushuo* 帝監圖說), a 1573 pictorial compendium of rulers, good and bad, from Chinese history; the similarly themed *Cultivating Rectitude, Illustrated and Explained* (*Yangzheng Tujie* 養正圖解) published in the 1590s; and the *Pictures of the Sage's Traces* (*Shengji Tu* 聖蹟圖) published from the mid-Ming onward. What emerges so strikingly in Murray's research about these and the other texts is the degree to

which they circulated, were patronised, read and endorsed by Ming literati, officials, and members of the imperial court.

Murray brings great clarity, lucidity and scholarly authority to chronicle the subtle and complex connections and relationships with patronage, interpretation, readerships, political and social agendas at work in this fascinating body of material. That this book is the product of many years of substantive research by the author into both Buddhist and Confucian Chinese narrative illustration is evident throughout. This study is a rich and invaluable scholarly source for anyone interested in Chinese narrative illustration, book culture and readerships in China, or for those interested in the evolution of illustration in Confucian texts through two millennia of imperial rule, until the collapse of the Qing resulted in Confucianism becoming a largely discredited ideology of government in mainland China. It addresses a broad body of material that, though often unacknowledged and overlooked, has occupied a considerable role in Chinese visual culture.

The book is well served with a comprehensive glossary of Chinese terms as well as a thorough and extensive bibliography, of both Chinese and English language sources. Given the nature of the subject matter, the illustrations and plates throughout are appropriately of excellent quality; a feature of great help in following the development and progression of texts and images identified and used throughout the book. A comprehensive index completes the paratextual apparatus of the book. The book is itself an attractive and well produced volume that should find its rightful place on the bookshelves of scholars and students of Chinese visual culture for many years to come.

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