

A Study on the Late Ming Woodblock Printing of Admonitions in *A Mirror for the Emperor, Illustrated and Explained*

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Abstract

A Mirror for the Emperor, Illustrated and Explained originally was an imperial story textbook handwritten and illustrated with paintings. Shortly after the Longqing emperor (r.1567-1572) passed away, Zhang Juzheng (1525-1582) led a group of officials in compiling it. In 1573, it was engraved in wood blocks and printed. The Pan Yunduan woodblock printed edition now in the collection of the Japanese Imperial Household Agency, in terms of the primary nature of its illustrations and the carving of the woodblocks, is of considerable quality. As a result, the present study first analyzes the issues related to this Pan Yunduan imprint, with various aspects pointing to it as the one closest to the original painted version. The Pan print edition is also used as the basis here for discussing the contents, editorial purpose, and relationship between text and image in *A Mirror for the Emperor, Illustrated and Explained*. With the help of other textual evidence, further analysis is provided on how this book influenced the Wanli emperor (r.1573-1620). Not only was text used for narration, Zhang Juzheng with the illustrations in this book also skillfully transmitted information difficult to convey with words, successfully leading the Wanli emperor to model himself on the exemplar cases of previous rulers. Consequently, this study attempts to analyze important information conveyed by both text and imagery. In doing so, the study examines the true motivation behind Zhang Juzheng's compilation and editing while attempting to explore issues that have been difficult to address in art historical studies on didactic pictures; i.e., how didactic imagery affected intended audiences and their reaction to the teachings contained therein. Thus, it emphasizes the important role that this book played in the first ten years of the Wanli emperor's rule.

Keywords: *A Mirror for the Emperor, Illustrated and Explained*, Ming dynasty woodblock printing, Zhang Juzheng, didactic painting, Wanli

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