

The outstanding feature of this herbal supposed to have been the standard work of its class during the Southern Sung period is the size and excellence of its illustrations, far better than those of any other ancient herbal that has been preserved.

Wang Chi-hsien and his collaborators say merely, "The pictures and figures are largely based on the old drawings and presented in outline." They are large, bold, and well executed though semidiagrammatic, doubtless because they copy old conventional figures; they show a surprisingly high level of woodcut illustrations, far better than most other famous Chinese herbals and far better than most European herbals of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Several manuscript copies of this work, seen in various libraries in China and Japan, all showed the same high standard of pictorial art and prove that this is no chance copy changed and bettered by the copyist but merely a true copy of the work as originally compiled and printed by Imperial edict. Several notices by Chinese and Japanese bibliographers note the superior character of the illustrations but state that the text is often greatly contracted, which is true of the copy secured for the Library of Congress. More than any other early Chinese herbals that have been preserved, this one awakens a respect for the accuracy and artistic skill of the illustrators. It is very possible that if ever the original printed editions of the early Sung herbals are discovered by some lucky chance, they will be found to have excellent illustrations as well as well-printed texts. Even in its imperfect state this herbal is one of the treasures of the Library of Congress.

There is a chance that this herbal, the only one of which the illustrations have been considered to be of such merit as to justify their perpetuation in manuscript copies apart from the bulk of the text, may prove to be based on the great *T'u ching pên ts'ao* of Su Sung published in the second half of the eleventh century less than a century before the *Shao Hsing chiao ting ching shih ch'eng lei pei chi pên ts'ao* which is confessedly "largely based on the old drawings" which must have been of superior merit to be so good in copies. The *T'u ching pên ts'ao* from its