



The World in Miniature: Container Gardens and Dwellings in Far Eastern Religious Thought

By Rolf Stein

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In this volume of three related essays, the reader will encounter a system of interlocking images and symbols that lies at the core of the Far Eastern view of the universe - a system that informs cosmology, ritual, ethics, aesthetics, and many aspects of everyday life. The first essay, 'miniature Gardens in the Far East', summarizes the complex cultural significance of the gardens of fantastic rocks and dwarfed trees placed in basins, of Chinese origin but transmitted to other Far Eastern cultures. The author demonstrates that these gardens are icons whose components and forms not only symbolize but replicate paradise realms important in ancient Chinese religion and folk beliefs. He shows that by replicating such realms, the gardens both manifest and bestow on their possessor the magical powers associated with them, and he details exactly how the gardens accomplished this. Many subtle mutations of the miniature garden, such as subterranean worlds equipped with their own sun and moon and populated with aspirants of eternity, are revealed. The other two essays augment and complement the riches of 'Miniature Gardens' with an enlightening treatment of the domestic and religious architecture of East Asia. 'Dwelling Places, Their Physical Details' discusses how the traditional cultures of China and Tibet give material form to their cosmological speculations. The author provides a detailed description of traditional housing, isolating the various parts of dwellings and identifying their symbolism. He explains the significance of orienting houses with regard to the cardinal directions and shows how the theories of Yin and Yang and the Five Activities influenced their forms. The subject of the third essay, 'The World and Architecture in Religious Thought', is the nature, significance, and symbolism of the temples and holy buildings of China, Mongolia, and Tibet, and the projection of their structure onto conceptions of the structure of the sacred mountains K'un-lun and Sumeru.<

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