EMPRESS WU OF THE TANG DYNASTY:

BECOMING THE ONLY FEMALE EMPEROR IN CHINA

by

Jong Min Rhee

A Thesis Presented to the
FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
MASTER OF ARTS
(EAST ASIAN LANGUAGES AND CULTURES)

December 2008

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a re-evaluation of Empress Wu (624-705) of the Tang dynasty, who became the only female emperor in Chinese history. In the Chinese historical texts, evaluations of Empress Wu as an emperor by Confucian historians were generally hostile, but were not consistently so. This study first analyzes and compares descriptions of Empress Wu in primary sources. It investigates how Confucian historiography affected each primary source and how the accounts changed over time, in general becoming more negative. Second, this study examines what components helped Empress Wu become an emperor, including an analysis of Tang social conditions and Empress Wu's political deeds. Through these analyses, this study attempts to explain how Empress Wu was able to become the only female emperor in Chinese history.

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Throughout Chinese history there have been about 200 male emperors. Officials who staffed the bureaucracy, as well, were all male. Besides the emperors and officials, empresses, consorts, and eunuchs were members of the palace, but they did not officially participate in government affairs. There is just one exception, a female emperor who ruled China during the Tang dynasty (618-907), Empress Wu (Zetian Wuhou 則天武后).

Empress Wu (624-705), first appeared in Chinese history as a consort of Taizong (太宗 626-649), at that time being called 'Lady of Talents' (Cairen 才人). After Taizong's death, she stayed at a Buddhist temple for some time in order to mourn for Taizong. However, she re-entered the palace as Gaozong's (高宗 649-683) consort and subsequently became an empress. She finally founded a new dynasty, the Zhou, and became its one and only emperor. Empress Wu's name is Wu Zhao (武曌),[1] while she is generally referred to as Empress Wu (武后) or Wu Zetian (武則天). According to her list of titles, she was also called Lady of Bright Deportment Wu (武昭儀), and Empress Dowager Wu (武太后). "Empress" in English has two meanings: one is "the consort of an emperor," and the other

[1] The *Old Tang History* and the *New Tang History* record her name as Wu Zhao (武曌). According to the *Old Tang History* and the *New Tang History*, however, the character, "曌," was one of the new characters created by Empress Wu in 690. She changed her name to 曌 in 690, but there is no record about her real name in Chinese history. *Jiu Tangshu* 6, 120; *Xin Tangshu* 76, 3481.

definition is “a female potentate exercising supreme or absolute power.”[2] Both meanings of ‘empress’ can be applied to Empress Wu. Among her several names, this paper will use Wu Zhao (637-655), Empress Wu (655-683), Empress Dowager Wu (683-690), and Emperor Wu (690-705) according to her official position at different times.

Empress Wu’s rise is one of the most remarkable events in the Tang dynasty if we consider the historical background of that time. It is a wonder that a female could become an emperor in early China because of the strong patriarchal system of the time that opposed a woman’s rise to power. The status of empresses, of course, was generally not higher than that of emperors throughout world history, as empresses usually serve as the main wife of the emperor. Moreover, it seems that the system of Chinese patriarchy had been especially rigid, in comparison to other regions of the world, in its hierarchal system and Subordination of women. The historiography of Empress Wu was influenced by the zeitgeist of the time in which it was written, especially due to the fact that her annals were written by Confucian scholars. There is no doubt that most descriptions of Empress Wu, the only female emperor in Chinese history, were negative in nature. From the Confucian scholars’ perspective, Empress Wu led a very immoral life, because she married both Taizong, and his own son, Gaozong. Also, Empress Wu was a breakaway from the Confucian tradition, in which women were subordinate to men:

[2] *The Oxford English dictionary* 3 (Oxford, The University Press, Oxford, 1961), 132.

> From the very first, the historical record of her reign has been hostile, biased and curiously fragmentary and incomplete. Less is known of the details of political life during her half-century of dominance than of any comparable period of the Tang.[3]

Most of the Chinese historical documents described her negatively, but there is no evidence to back up this negativity because of the lack of any detailed record of her rule within the Tang contemporary records.

Confucianism's ideal of women has changed over time. The narrow- minded perspective toward women of earlier periods affected the historiography of Empress Wu. This paper divides Confucianism into two: traditional Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism. The Confucian ideals of women are slightly different between the two Confucian systems. Traditional Confucianism refers to the Confucianism from the time period of Confucius to pre-Song dynasty. Confucianism in this period began to emphasize the difference between the roles of men and women. One of the Confucian classics, the *Changes* (*Zhouyi*, 周易) presents a passage which expresses the differentiation between men and women:

> …women should stay inside. Men should stay outside… Fathers should behave like fathers. Sons should behave like sons. Elder brothers should behave like elder brothers. Younger brothers should behave like younger brothers. Husbands should behave like husbands. Wives should behave like wives…
>
> …女正位乎內．男正位乎外…父父．子子．兄兄．弟弟．夫夫．婦婦…[4]

[3] Denis Twitchett and Howard J. Wechsler "Kao-tsung(reign 648-83) and the Empress Wu: the inheritor and the usurper." In *the Cambridge History of China Vol. 3, Sui and Tang China, 589-906*, ed. Denis Twitchett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 245.

[4] *Xinyi yijing duben,* ed. Jianxun Guo (Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1996), 289.

Also, the *Record of Rites* (Liji 禮記) records the spatial restrictions of men and women:

> The observances of propriety commenced with a careful attention to the relations between husband and wife. They built the mansion and its apartments, distinguishing between exterior and interior parts. The men occupied the exterior; the women the interior. The mansion was deep, and the doors were strong, guarded by porter and gateman. The men did not enter the interior; the women did not come out into the exteriror.[5]

In addition, the *Book of Songs* (*Shijing*, 詩經) said to be compiled by Confucius, presents a very negative perspective of the role of women and their influence in politics:

> A clever husband builds a city, but a clever wife tears it down....Disorder does not come down from Heaven, rather it is the spawn of these women...Thus no woman serves the public, but they stay with their weaving and their loom.[6]
>
> 哲夫成城, 哲婦傾城... 亂匪降自天. 生自婦人... 婦無公事, 休其蠶織.[7]

Confucians considered that it was reasonable to divide roles into two fields, outside work for men and inside work for women, in an agricultural society. However, the differences between men and women developed toward gender hierarchy. The *Record of Rites* (*Liji*, 禮記) also presents this hierarchy, which subordinates women to men throughout their life cycle:

---

[5] As cited in Bettine Birge, "Zhu Xi and Women's Education," in *Neo-Confucian Education: The Formative Stage*, ed. Wm Theodore de Bary and John W. Chaffee (Berkely and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 332.

[6] The translation modified from *The Book of Songs* (Shijing, 詩經), trans. Arthur Waley, (NY: Grove Press. 1996), 284.

[7] *Shijing zhijie*, ed. Zizhan Chen (Taipei: Shulin chuban youxian gongsi, 1992), 1045.

> Men lead women, women follow men. The moral duties of husbands and wives are started from this. When women are young, they should follow father and brothers. When they get married, they should follow the husband, and when the husband dies, they should follow their son.
>
> 男帥女．女從男．夫婦之義．由此始也．婦人從人者也．幼從父兄．嫁從夫．夫死從子.[8]

According to traditional Confucianism, women were subordinated to men and should stay in the home and attend to the inner quarters. Diana Y. Paul provides a well organized summary of the traditional Confucianism:

> According to its fundamental teachings, the female principle (yin, 陰) was to be ruled and to be submissive while the complementary male principle (yang, 陽) was to rule and to be dominant. Harmony would be disrupted and disequilibrium would ensue if flagrant deviations from that natural order were allowed to occur unchecked.[9]

The Neo-Confucian ideal of women has some differences from the traditional Confucian ideal of women. Neo-Confucianism refers to a style of Confucianism developed in the Song dynasty (960-1279). Neo-Confucianism combined the modified Buddhism and Daoism that were suitable for Confucianism with traditional Confucianism. Neo-Confucianism maintained that women were subordinate to men as traditional Confucianism did. In addition, Neo-Confucianism emphasized women's chastity toward their husbands and loyalty to their in–law families much

---

[8] *Xinyi liji duben*, ed. Yihua Jiang (Taipei, Sanmin shuju, 1996), 377.

[9] Diana Y. Paul. "Empress Wu and the Historians: A tyrant and saint of Classical China," in *Unspoken world: Women's religious lives*, ed. Nancy Auer Falk and Rita M. Gross (Belmont, CA:Wadsworth, 1989) , 146. For more information, see Bettine Birge, "Zhu Xi and Women's Education," in *Neo-Confucian Education: The Formative Stage*, ed. Wm Theodore de Bary and John W. Chaffee (Berkely and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989) 329-333.

more than traditional Confucianism had done. Neo-Confucianism did not allow second marriages except under the particular conditions that a widow "is poor, all alone, and about to starve to death."[10] It placed greater emphasis on chastity and restricting women to the inner quarter. It denied women any direct political participation. Rather, it granted a considerable amount of authority to women within the restricted space of the household.[11] This included granting women power over decisions within their houses as family managers. Women under Neo-Confucianism could be educated for the reason that women should raise and help educate their children and also use their educated knowledge to have intelligent discussion with their husbands, which would benefit the family.[12]

Based on the different perspectives between traditional Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism, Chapter 2 will examine how Empress Wu is described by post-Tang Confucians in the *Old Tang History* (*Jiu Tangshu*, 舊唐書), the *New Tang History* (*Xin Tangshu*, 新唐書), the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* (*Zizhi tongjian*, 資治通鑑), and the *Outline and Digest of the General Mirror* (*Zizhi tongjian gangmu*, 資治通鑑綱目). According to these primary sources, we can find

[10] Theresa Kelleher. "Confucianism," in *Women in World Religions* , ed. Arvind Sharma (NY: State University of New York Press. 1987), 155.

[11] Bettine Birge, "Zhu Xi and Women's Education," in *Neo-Confucian Education: The Formative Stage*, ed. Wm Theodore de Bary and John W. Chaffee (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989) 343-348. For more information, see Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, (1993), 261-271.

[12] Bettine Birge, "Zhu Xi and Women's Education," in *Neo-Confucian Education: The Formative Stage*, ed. Wm Theodore de Bary and John W. Chaffee (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 348-352.

that the descriptions of Empress Wu grew more negative as time went on. Through this examination, I show that the Confucian viewpoint toward women affected the records of Empress Wu in primary sources. Also, this chapter will investigate the objectiveness of descriptions of Empress Wu in these primary sources by comparing these sources and analyzing their logic.

In Chapter 3, I will explore social conditions during the Tang dynasty that made the appearance of a female emperor possible. Also, Empress Wu's history will be re-analyzed by neglecting the descriptions which were probably fabricated. In this chapter, Empress Wu's reign will be divided into two periods. The first period will be defined as the period when Empress Wu was an 'Empress' as the consort of an emperor (655-690),[13] and the second period will be when Empress Wu was an 'Empress' as a female potentate exercising supreme or absolute power (690-704).[14]

[13] This will also include when she was an empress dowager, Huang Taihou (皇太后) in Chinese.

[14] In the 12th month, 683, Kaozong died and Zhongzong (中宗) became an emperor. In the 9th month of 690, Empress Wu became emperor of Zhou (周). In the first month of 705, Empress Wu abdicated, and Zhongzong (中宗) re-reigned. That is why I define the period of empress until 704. According to Choi, there are several opinions about Empress Wu's period: 45years, 46years, and 47years.[14] Here, Empress Wu's periods will be considered as a total 46 years with three parts: 24 years (660-683) as an empress with the former meaning, 7 years (684-690) as empress dowager, and 15 years (690-704) as empress with the latter meaning. Hwangja Choi (최황자) "Tang Muchikcheongua jeongchijipdanseryoukui byounjil (당 무측천과 정치집단세력의 변질 T'ang Wu - tse - t'ien [Wu Zetian] and transmutation of the political system power)" *Junggukhakbo* 26 (1986): 91.

CHAPTER II. EMPRESS WU IN PRIMARY SOURCES: HOW DESCRIPTIONS OF EMPRESS WU CHANGED OVER TIME

As mentioned above, the primary sources describe Empress Wu negatively. In this chapter, I will show how each primary source describes her and how the descriptions change. I will mainly examine four sources: the *Old Tang History*, the *New Tang History*, the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government*, and the *Outline and Digest of the General Mirror*. In comparing the above mentioned sources, I will show how the depictions changed over time.

The four primary sources are divided into two groups, based on genres. The *Old Tang History* and the *New Tang History* are different from the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* and the *Outline and Digest of the General Mirror*, as the former documents follow the annals-memoir style (*jizhuanti* 紀傳體), and the latter documents follow the chronological style (*biannianti* 編年體). The former historical genre was pioneered by Sima Qian (司馬遷), and consists of three major elements: basic annals (本紀), monographs (志), and memoirs (or biographies 列傳). Basic annals record the biographies of each emperor, and Monographs "cover the historical evolution of selected institutions such as rituals, the calendar, astronomy, or political economy."[15] Also, the memoir section includes the biographies of important persons other than non-emperors such as empresses, princes, and officials.

[15] Endymion Wilkinson. *Chinese History: a Manual*, (Cambridge: MA. Harvard University Press, 2000), 502.

The *Old Tang history* is the earliest document of the twenty-five classic Chinese histories (*ershiwushi*, 二十五史) that includes Empress Wu's records. The *Old Tang history* consists of 200 chapters: 20 chapters of basic annals, 30 chapters of monographs, and 150 chapters of biographies. Several historians and officials of the later Jin (後晋 936-946) compiled this document between 941 and 945, about forty years after the collapse of the Tang dynasty and before the founding of the Song dynasty. [16] The document presents one name, Liu Xu (劉昫), as the author.

Liu Xu, however, supervised the compilation at the end of the work, and he did not contribute to the compilation specifically.[17] Actually, several officials participated in the compilation of the *Old Tang History*. While compiling the documents, the head supervisors were changed three times. The three supervisors were Zhao Ying (趙瑩), Sang Weihan (桑維翰), and Liu Xu[18]. The changes of supervisors also caused additions and subtractions of the compilation members, depending on each supervisor's disposition. According to Gao Guokang, a Chinese historian today, the process of compiling the *Old Tang History* took a short time, only four years, so the basic annals in the *Old Tang History* mostly copied the

[16] Denis Twitchett. *The writing of official history under the Tang*, (NY: Cambridge University press, 1992), 192-196.

[17] Ibid. p. 195-196.

[18] Ibid. pp. 192-196.

Veritable Records (*Shilu* 實錄) of the Tang.[19] Veritable Records are written about the previous Emperor after the emperor's death. As the *Old Tang History* had been compiled under the conditions of the head supervisors and compilation members changing at various times, we can surmise that there is little or no individual personal agenda or personal biases present from the writers.

The *New Tang History*, written by Ouyang Xiu (歐陽脩) and Song Qi (宋祁) in 1060 during the Song dynasty, consists of 225 chapters: 10 chapters of basic annals, 50 chapters of monographs, and 165 chapters of biographies. This document attempted to amend the *Old Tang History*, but in fact it could not replace the *Old Tang History*.[20] Gao Guokang says that the *Old Tang History* includes original historical materials from the Tang royal palace, and detailed information.[21] The *New Tang History*'s merit is that it is more readable than the *Old Tang history*, because the *New Tang History* reduced the depictions of the *Old Tang History* by deleting difficult and unnecessary phrases. Its defect, however, is that in the process of deleting parts to make it more readable, much information was also lost, so that this

[19] Gao, Guokang (高國抗), Zongguo gudai shixueshi gaiyao (中國古代史學史概要), trans. Sang Hun Oh, Gae Seok Lee, & Byung Han Cho (오상훈, 이개석, 조병한). *Jungguksahaksa ha (중국사ㅁ사下, Chinese Historiography*), (Seoul: Pulbit, 1998), 35, 46.

[20] Ibid. p. 35.

[21] Ibid. p. 35.

document "is not nearly as informative, and it does not satisfy those interested in historical data."[22]

Influences on the writers may have also affected the records of the *New Tang History*. Ouyang Xiu and Song Qi were Confucian scholars in the Northern Song dynasty. Ouyang Xiu, as a classicist, contributed to fortifying the Confucian tradition. His ideals and beliefs about women also followed the Confucian tradition. His other main historical work, *Historical Records of the Five Dynasties* (*Wu da shi ji* 五代史記), also reflects his ideas toward women by placing blame, rather than praise, on women. *Historical Records of the Five Dynasties* contains writings of severe blame toward women "for political and moral decay" as a result of their deviating from the proper ideal of women.[23] The *New Tang History* also reflects his ideal of Confucian women. It includes forty-seven biographies of notable women. This number of biographies is twenty-one more than the twenty-six biographies of notable women in the *Old Tang history*. While both of these documents praise and value women for fulfilling their duties and being ideal women according to the Confucian perspective, the numerical difference illustrates Ouyang Xiu's emphasis on the value of these women. Some of the newly added biographies of notable

[22] James T. C. Liu. *Ou-Yang Hsiu: an Eleventh century Neo-Confucianist,* (Stanford: CA. Stanford University Press, 1967), 107-108.

[23] Ibid. 214.

women in the *New Tang History* even show moral extremism such as women maiming or killing themselves for their ideals.[24]

By contrast, the writing style of the other two histories I will examine is based on the chronological style. This genre records a history in chronological order without separate elements. The *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* and the *Outline and Digest of the General Mirror* belong to this genre.

The *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* was written by Sima Guang (司馬光) in 1084 during the Song dynasty. This document consists of 294 chapters. Contemporary scholars have concluded that this document was mainly adopted from the *Old Tang History*. Sima Guang was a conservative Confucian and developer of Neo-Confucianism in the Northern Song dynasty. His ideal of women is similar to Ouyang Xiu's perspective. One of his books, *Precepts for Family Life* (*Jiafan*, 家範) shows his ideal of women. He strictly differentiates men and women as follows:

> Men and women should not sit mixed together, should not hang their clothes together, and should not use same towels and brushes…[25]

[24] Richard L. Davis. "Chaste and Filial Women in Chinese Historical Writings of the Eleventh Century" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 121, no. 2 (2001): 205-209.

[25] *Jiafan* 463-464. As cited from Park, Ji Hun (박지훈). "Songdai Sadaebuui yeoseongguan (송대 사대부의 여성관, Song Literati's Concepts of Women)," *Zunggukhakbo* 46 (2002): 280.

> As a wife of a man, a woman should have six virtues; first, chasteness, second, obedience, third, non-jealousy; fourth, frugality, fifth, politeness, and sixth, working hard in the house.[26]

While he also presents six virtues for his ideal of women, he strictly discriminates between the virtues that men and women should have. However, the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* emphasizes political events and shows the reflection of his thoughts about ideal women much less than the *New Tang History* shows Ouyang Xiu's.

The *Outline and Digest of the General Mirror* was written by Zhu Xi (朱熹) in 1172 during the Southern Song dynasty. This document consists of fifty-nine chapters. The records about Empress Wu in the *Outline and Digest of the General Mirror* are much simpler and shorter than depictions of Empress Wu in the *Old Tang History*, the *New Tang History,* and the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government.* Current scholars criticize it saying, that Zhu Xi summarized the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* too briefly, so that records of Empress Wu are too short to use his document as a historical record. Moreover, Zhu Xi denies any acknowledgement that Empress Wu ruled as an emperor. He was a great Neo-Confucian of the southern Song dynasty. Zhu Xi's ideal of women was reflected in this document.

---

[26] *Jiafan* 659. As modified from Ibid.: 278 and Ping Yao. "Precepts for Family Life (*Jiafan*) 家範, Sima Guang 司馬光," in *Images of Women in Chinese Thought and Culture: Writing from the Pre-Qin Period to the Song Dynasty*, ed. Robin R. Wang (2003), 418.

Table 1 below shows the components of the four primary sources.

	Total	basic annals	monographs	memoirs
The *Old Tang History*	200 Chapters	20 Chapters	30 Chapters	150 Chapters
The *New Tang History*	225 Chapters	10 Chapters	50 Chapters	165 Chapters
The *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government*	294 Chapters	294 Chapters	N/A	N/A
The *Outline and Digest of the General Mirror*	59 Chapters	59 Chapters	N/A	N/A

Table 1: The components of the four primary sources

2.1. The placements of Empress Wu narratives within the primary sources and basic narratives

The four primary sources record the descriptions of Empress Wu in diverse places. I will examine how each primary source differs from the others, and how the four primary sources describe Empress Wu within the structure of each source. In the *Old Tang History* and the *New Tang History*, the locations of separate records about Empress Wu are different. Because the basic annals of both documents are based on the Veritable Records of the Tang, the two documents include records of Empress

Wu in the basic annals. However, only the *New Tang History* gives Empress Wu a separate biography in the memoir section.[27]

The *Old Tang History* includes a separate section on Empress Wu in chapter six of the basic annals (Benji diliu Zetian huanghou 本紀第六 則天皇后). There is no separate biography of her in the biographies of Empresses and Consorts. It seems that the *Old Tang History* considers her solely as an emperor. Nevertheless, the basic annals did not call her Emperor (Huangdi 皇帝) or female emperor (Nuhuangdi 女皇帝). Instead it called her the emperor's principal wife (Huanghou 皇后) and Empress Dowager (太后).

The *New Tang History* documents the records of Empress Wu in both the basic annals and the memoirs. One common aspect in both the *Old Tang History* and the *New Tang History* is her title, Emperor's principal wife (皇后), and Empress Dowager (太后). In the *New Tang History*, the fourth chapter of basic annals consists of the reigns of Empress Wu and Emperor Zhongzong. (Benji disi 本紀第四 Zetian shunsheng Wu huanghou 則天順聖武皇后, and Zhongzong huangdi 中宗皇帝). Unlike the *Old Tang History*, the *New Tang History* summarizes Empress Wu's records in basic annals. However, this document also includes Empress Wu's records in memoirs. The first chapter of the biographies consists of thirteen separate biographies of the thirteen empresses and consorts. Among the thirteen biographies, the fifth biography is the record of Empress Wu as a principal wife of emperor

[27] See Table 2.

Gaozong (Liezhuan diyi 列傳第一 Houfei shang 后妃上 Gaozong Zetian Wu huanghou 高宗則天武皇后). This means that the former history focuses more on Empress Wu as an emperor and not as an Emperor's wife, but the latter one focuses on her as an emperor and also an emperor's wife. Table 2 shows where the descriptions of Empress Wu are in the *Old Tang History* and the *New Tang History*. It indicates whether Empress Wu has her own separate record in the basic annals or in a biography. It also indicates where information about Empress Wu can be found in records of other Tang personages.

	Parts	As a separate record	Records of other personages that include information about Empress Wu
The *Old Tang History*	Basic annals	Yes	Emperor Taizong, Emperor Gaozong, Emperor Zhongzong
	Memoirs	No	Empress Wang, several officials
The *New Tang History*	Basic annals	Yes	Emperor Taizong, Emperor Gaozong, Emperor Zhongzong
	Memoirs	Yes	Empress Wang, the Crown prince Hong, several officials

Table 2: The location of descriptions of Empress Wu in the *Old Tang History* and the *New Tang History*

Unlike the *Old Tang History* and the *New Tang History*, the format of the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* and the *Outline and Digest of the*

General Mirror does not allow for separate records of Empress Wu. However, by observing whose reign titles the two documents include during the records of Empress Wu, we can examine how each of the documents evaluates her.

The major difference between the two documents is that discourse of the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* gives Empress Wu's status as a ruler, but the discourse of the *Outline and Digest of the General Mirror* considers Empress Wu as a usurper. Sima Guang and Zhu Xi named her "Emperor's principal wife" until 683, when Gaozong died. Also, the records of Empress Wu until 683 are included in Gaozong's period of reign. From 684 to 689, both documents name her Empress Dowager as the *Old Tang History* and the *New Tang History* do, instead of Emperor or female Emperor. However, there is the another difference between the two documents: from 684, when she became Empress Dowager, the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid for Government* uses Empress Wu's own reign titles, but the *Outline and Digest of the General Mirror* uses Zhongzong's reign titles. Similar to Sima Guang's *Comprehensive Mirror*, the *Old Tang History* and the *New Tang History* use Empress Wu's reign titles. For the eitire 21 years during Empress Wu's regency and the period of the Zhou dynasty (684-705), Zhu Xi cites the date by Zhongzong's fictional year on the throne.[28] In other words, Zhu Xi does not acknowledge Empress Wu as a ruler.

The records after 689 show another difference between the two: Sima Guang still labeled her as Empress Dowager, but Zhu Xi labeled her as Madam Wu (Wushi

[28] See *Zizhitongjiangangmu* 41 , 20; 42 , 32. Compare *Zizhitongjian* 203, 6417.

武氏) or Madam Wu of Zhou (Zhou Wushi (周武氏) without any title, because she had changed the name of the dynasty to Zhou and named herself Emperor. It seems that Zhu Xi no longer considered her as empress, but as a rebel against the Tang dynasty under the reign of emperor Zhongzong:

> In the ninth month, Madam Wu[29] changed the name of the dynasty to Zhou, and named herself emperor…
>
> 九月武氏改國號曰周稱皇帝…[30]
>
> In the first month of the ninth year, spring, the emperor stayed at Fangzhou. Madam Wu of Zhou presented someone at the court recommended by the Relief Commissioner…
>
> 九年春正月帝在房州. 周武氏引見存撫使所奉人...[31]

Zhu Xi records that Zhongzong reigned between 684 and 710. In other words, he considered that the Tang dynasty still existed even during the Zhou dynasty (690-705). As there should be just one emperor in one time period, Zhu Xi could not accept Empress Wu as a ruler and Zhou as a dynasty. Thus, Zhu Xi did not use Empress Wu's titles during her reign and rather adopted Zhongzong's titles, although Zhongzong did not rule the country during the Zhou dynasty. Table 3 compares Empress Wu's titles that Sima Guang and Zhu Xi use during each time period.

---

[29] 氏 is usually added after surname of a man or a woman. However, 武氏 in this passage points out Empress Wu so that 武氏 could be translated as Ms. Wu or Madam Wu. In the next page, I translate 皇后王氏 as Empress Wang without translation of 氏. Therefore, I do not translate 氏 in light of the emphasis that there is no title for her in this passage.

[30] *Zizhitongjiangangmu* 41 下, 16.

[31] *Zizhitongjiangangmu* 41 下, 21.

	Written by Sima Guang		Written by Zhu Xi	
	Reign titles	Empress Wu's title	Reign titles	Empress Wu's title
From 655 to 683	Gaozong's reign titles	Empress	Gaozong's reign titles	Empress
Form 684 to 689	Empress Wu's reign titles	Empress Dowager	Zhongzong's reign titles	Empress Dowager
From 690 to 704	Empress Wu's reign titles	Empress Dowager	Zhongzong's reign titles	None

Table 3: The use of reign titles and Empress Wu's title in the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* by Sima Guang and the *Outline and Digest of the General Mirror by* Zhu Xi

Up to this point, my examination of Empress Wu has focused on the structure of each of the four primary sources. The *Old Tang History* and the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* evaluate Empress Wu as a ruler rather than the emperor's wife, but the *New Tang History* considers her as a ruler and Gaozong's principal wife. Finally, the *Outline and Digest of the general Mirror* considers her as the emperor's wife and a usurper.

2.2. Different descriptions of the same events

As mentioned above, the records of Empress Wu are contained in several places in the primary sources. In this section of the study, I will examine Empress Wu by focusing on the detailed descriptions in the three primary sources other than Zhu Xi's document. The two passages below are at the beginning of the "Basic Annals" of Empress Wu in both the *Old Tang History* and the *New Tang History*.

The *Old Tang History* says that:

> …[She] received the position of 'Lady of Bright Deportment'. At this time, Empress Wang, Excellent Sister-in -law Xiao [Pure Consort Xiao], and Lady of Bright Deportment Wu vied for the emperor's affection. They slandered each other. The emperor did not accept any of it. [Wu Zhao] was promoted to 'Chamber Consort'[32]. In 655, Empress Wang was dethroned and Chamber Consort Wu became empress.
>
> …拜昭儀. 時皇后王氏、良娣蕭氏頻與武昭儀爭寵, 互讒毀之, 帝皆不納. 進號宸妃. 永徽六年, 廢王皇后而立武宸妃為皇后.[33]

The *New Tang History* says that:

> …[She] received the position of 'Lady of Bright Deportment'. She advanced to 'Chamber Consort'[34]. In 655, Empress Wang was dethroned and Chamber Consort Wu became empress.

[32] The Emperor attempted to make a new position, "Chamber Consort" (Chenfei 宸妃), in order to give the title to Wu Zhao. This passage shows that Wu Zhao received the new title. However, other passages in the *New Tang History* and the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* record that the Emperor tried to make the new position, but the attempt was foiled by the opposition of officials. *Xin Tangshu* 76, 3475 and *Zizhitongjian* 199, 6288. The translation of "宸妃," 'Chamber Consort,' is used for the Ming dynasty. Charles O Hucker. *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*. (Stanford: Stanford University press. (1985*)*, 122.

[33] *Jiu Tangshu* 6, 115.

[34] See footnote 32.

…立為昭儀，進號宸妃．永徽六年，高宗廢皇后王氏，立宸妃為皇后.[35]

These passages do not show the process that Wu Zhao took to become an empress, but highlight the positions that Wu Zhao achieved. In this way, basic annals in the *Old Tang History* and the *New Tang History* also do not indicate the detailed process and reasons for Empress Wu's "ruling from behind the curtain"(垂簾聽政). Historians filled in the omissions by using other parts of the *Old Tang History* and the *New Tang History* and later primary sources such as the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* as sources. However, the contents of the sources used to fill in these omissions are somewhat different from each other. Consequently, there are some arguments among historians about this topic. I will examine four events that are critical aspects of these arguments: 1) the reasons for Empress Wang's dethronement, 2) the death of ex-Empress Wang, 3) the reasons and the way of "ruling from behind the curtain," and 4) the death of the Crown prince, Li Hong.

2.2.1. The dethronement of Empress Wang

In primary sources, there are three reasons that are mentioned for Empress Wang's dethronement: 1) Empress Wang was accused of killing Wu Zhao's daughter, 2) she tried to poison the emperor, and 3) she used an incantation which was prohibited in the Tang period. In the *Cambridge History*, Twitchett arranges

[35] *Xin Tangshu* 4, 81.

these three cases chronologically.[36] Each primary source includes different reasons for her dethronement in each part. Table 4 shows the various passages of the three cases from the primary sources and where the passages are contained.

	The *Old Tang History*		The *New Tang History*		The *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government*
	basic annals	Memoirs	basic annals	Memoirs	
Reason 1	N/A (Only in the commentary at the end of Empress Wu's basic annals (本紀 則天皇后))	N/A	N/A	The biography of Empress Wu (高宗則天武皇后)	In 654(永徽五年) 10th month
Reason 2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	In 655(永徽六年) 10th month
Reason 3	N/A	The biography of dethroned Empress Wang (高宗廢后王氏)	N/A	The biography of dethroned Empress Wang (高宗王皇后) The biography of Empress Wu (高宗則天武皇后)	In 655(永徽六年) 6th month

Table 4: The locations of records about the three reasons for Empress Wang's dethronement

In regards to the first reason, that Empress Wang was accused of killing Wu Zhao's daughter, it seems likely that Wu Zhao's daughter was not killed by Empress Wang or her mother, but rather she died naturally. This case is not recorded in the

[36] Denis Twitchett and Howard J. Wechsler "Kao-tsung(reign 648-83) and the Empress Wu: the inheritor and the usurper." In *the Cambridge History of China Vol. 3, Sui and Tang China, 589-906*, ed. Denis Twitchett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 248-249.

main text of the *Old Tang History*, but only in the commentary of Empress Wu's basic annals. The commentary says that Wu Zhao killed her own daughter:

> Chronicler(s) say(s) … it was Empress Wu's conspiracy to seize the position of Gaozong's legitimate wife by choking the breath from her own child, a swaddling infant…[37]
>
> 史臣曰... 武后奪嫡之謀也, 振喉絕襁褓之兒… [38]

This passage shows Wu Zhao's cruelty and maliciousness. However, it is not certain who wrote this commentary. We can only guess the writer(s) of the commentary would be one or some of the compilers of the *Old Tang History*. If this incident is true, this case should be in the main text of the basic annals of Empress Wu or the biography of ex-Empress Wang. The commentary about Wu Zhao was newly added by late Jin (後晉) historian(s). By contrast, the *New Tang History* gives the detailed description of this case in the biography of ex-Empress Wang as follows:

> Lady of Bright Deportment [Wu Zhao] furtively killed her child by smothering it with bedclothes, and [she] waited for the emperor's arrival… [The emperor] uncovered the bedclothes to see his child, but his child was dead. In alarm he asked the attendants. Everybody said that Empress [Wang] had just dropped by. The emperor could not investigate it, and angrily said, "the empress [Wang] killed my daughter…"
>
> 昭儀潛斃兒衾下, 伺帝至... 發衾視兒, 死矣. 驚問左右,皆曰 后適來...帝不能察, 怒曰 后殺吾女…[39]

---

[37] The translation modified Norman H Rothschild. "Rhetoric, ritual and support constituencies in the political authority of Wu Zhao, Woman emperor of China" (PhD diss., Brown University, 2003), 17.

[38] *Jiu Tangshu* 6, 133. Rothschild translates 兒 as son, but child is better translation for 兒 in this passage.

[39] *Xin Tangshu* 76, 3475.

Through this passage, this case became an official record from the *New Tang History*. The *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* describes this case similarly to The *New Tang history*:

> … Lady of Bright Deportment [Wu Zhao] furtively choked [her daughter], and coverd [her] with bedclothes. The emperor arrived, then Lady of Bright Deportment [Wu Zhao] brightly welcomed him with smile. [Wu Zhao] uncovered bedclothes to show that [his] daughter died. In alarm, [she] cried. [The emperor] asked attendants. Everybody said "the empress [wang] had just dropped by." The emperor was furious and said "the empress [Wang] killed my daughter."…
>
> …昭儀潛扼殺之, 覆之以被. 上至, 昭儀陽歡笑, 發被觀之, 女已死矣, 卽驚啼. 問左右, 左右皆曰, 皇后適來此. 上大怒曰, 后殺吾女…[40]

It may be true that Empress Wang was accused of killing Wu Zhao's daughter. However, it does not seem that Wu Zhao smothered her own daughter. Rather, the modern historian of the Tang, Dora Shu-fang Dien's argument is more credible:

> The infant may have died of crib death as we know it today… as fiction writer Hara Momoyo imagines, the room, with poor ventilation to begin with, could have been overheated with charcoal burners and filled with carbon monoxide.[41]

This case could have been fabricated by anti- Empress Wu Confucians who wanted to describe her negatively. Even though the three primary sources record that Wu Zhao killed her own daughter, she may possibly have conspired to entrap Empress Wang when her daughter naturally died, but it seems unlikely she would be as cruel

---

[40] *Zizhitongjian* 199, 6286-6287.

[41] Dora Shu-fang Dien. *Empress Wu Zetian in Fiction and in History: Female Defiance in Confucian China*, (Hauppauge:N.Y. Nova Science Publishers, 2003), 34. Fitzgerald also agrees with this. Charles P. Fitzgerald. *The Empress Wu*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1968), 23.

as choking her own daughter. It seems that the records may be a means of degrading Empress Wu by showing her cruelty.

The second reason for Empresss Wang's dethronement is that Empress Wang tried to poison the emperor. We can easily find this accusation to be problematic. The record of this case exists only in the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government*. Neither the *Old Tang History* nor the *New Tang History* records this case, and since these sources are more detailed and closer to the events, it is highly significant that they do not mention it.

Moreover, if we read the narrative in the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* carefully, we can find that the case is illogical:

> In winter, 10th month, the day Jiyou, [the emperor] handed down his order. It said that Empress Wang and Pure Consort Xiao tried to poison him [Emperor], and that they would be dethroned and made common people…
>
> 冬十月 己酉, 下詔稱, 王皇后蕭淑妃謀行鴆毒, 廢爲庶人…[42]

Empress Wang and Pure Consort Xiao were demoted after being accused of poisoning their emperor in 655, 10th month. Also, the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* records a conversation between the emperor and Empress Wang at the 11th month in the same year:

> Empress Wang and Pure Consort Xiao were imprisoned in a detached palace … [the emperor] was sympathetic to them and worried about them. He called out, "Empress and Pure Consort! Where are you?"
>
> 故后王氏 故淑妃蕭氏並囚於別院…惻然傷之, 呼曰 皇后, 淑妃安在?[43]

[42] *Zizhitongjian* 200, 6293.

Empress Wang and Pure Consort Xiao supposedly attempted to kill the emperor. If so, how and why would the emperor feel sympathy for them? Accordingly, the criminal charge that was made would be a pretext to dethrone the empress and the pure consort.

The last reason for her dethronement is that Empress Wang used an incantation. This reason is the most probable of the three relating to her dethronement. The use of an incantation was a very severe crime during the Tang:

> According to the Tang code of laws, sorcery was listed under the category of "depraved crimes,"… the most egregious sort of capital crime.[44]

All three primary sources record this case, but the descriptions of this case are not the same. The *Old Tang History* records that Empress Wang and her mother used magic:

> Empress [Wang] was afraid and was not secure. Her mother, Madam Liu and she secretly used magic to overcome [Wu Zhao]. After this case was discovered, the emperor [Gaozong] was angry… In 655, 10th month, [the emperor] dethroned the empress [Wang] …
>
> 后懼不自安，密與母柳氏求巫祝厭勝．事發，帝大怒… 永徽六年十月，廢后…[45]

Nevertheless, the *New Tang History* and the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* do not mention that they used magic, but say only that Empress Wu

---

[43] *Zizhitongjian* 200, 6294.

[44] Norman H. Rothschild. *Wu Zhao: China's only woman Emperor*, (New York: Peters Longman, (2008), 33.

[45] *Jiu Tangshu* 51, 2170.

falsely accused them of using magic. The *New Tang History* records this case in two different chapters. The biography of ex-Empress Wang says that:

> [Wu Zhao] then falsely accused the empress and [the empress's] mother of bewitching the emperor. Emperor [Gaozong] believed it… Subsequently, he issued a decree that Empress [Wang] be dethroned…
>
> …即誣后與母挾媚道蠱上，帝信之… 遂下詔廢后…[46]

Similarly, the biography of Empress Wu includes this case as follows:

> Lady of Bright Deportment [Wu Zhao] then falsely accused the empress and [the empress's] mother of using incantations. The emperor harbored earlier grievances and took their accusation as the truth. [The emperor] subsequently dethroned [Empress Wang]
>
> 昭儀乃誣后與母厭勝，帝挾前憾, 實其言, 將遂廢之[47]

The record of this case in the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* is closest to the record in the biography of Empress Wu in the *New Tang History*:

> The Lady of Bright Deportment Wu [Wu Zhao] falsely accused the empress and [the empress's] mother, Consort of Wei Madam Liu, of using incantations…
>
> 武昭儀誣王后與其母魏國夫人柳氏爲厭勝…[48]

From the *New Tang History*, "誣 (to accuse falsely)" suddenly shows up in the text. Therefore, it is not certain that Empress Wang and her mother used magic in order to

[46] *Xin Tangshu* 76, 3473.

[47] *Xin Tangshu* 76, 3475.

[48] *Zizhitongjian* 199, 6288.

overcome Wu Zhao or to kill the emperor. The one certain thing, however, is that the emperor dethroned Empress Wang for the possible reason that she used sorcery.

The first reason, that Empress Wang was accused of killing Wu Zhao's daughter, was probably fabricated by the anti-Wu historians in order to degrade Empress Wu. The second reason, that she tried to poison the emperor, would be a definite means for Empress Wang's dethronement without exception, so this reason is not logical as she would not jeopardize her status and safety in this way. I believe that the most likely reason for the dethronement of Empress Wang is the third reason, that she was rumored to have used an incantation.

2.2.2. The death of Empress Wang

In addition to the possible fabrication that Wu Zhao killed her own daughter, there is another description of Wu Zhao's barbarity: the death of Empress Wang. The three primary sources mention this incident similarly: Empress Wu gave an order to give a beating of one hundred strokes to Empress Wang and Pure Consort Xiao and cut off their hands and feet. The *Old Tang History* says:

> [The emperor went to the palace where Empress Wang and Pure Consort Xiao were imprisoned. He felt sympathetic and they had plaintive conversations.] Empress Wu [Wu Zhao] was aware of it and ordered to give a beating of one hundred strokes each to the commoner [Empress Wang] and Madam Xiao, and to chop off their hands and feet, and to throw them in a wine barrel…After a few days, they died.

> 武后知之，令人杖庶人及蕭氏各一百，截去手足，投於酒甕中…數日而卒[49]

The *New Tang History* records this incident as follows:

> Empress Wu [Wu Zhao] was aware of it, and quickly ordered a beating of one hundred strokes be given to the two people [Empress Wang and Pure Consort Xiao], and to cut off their hands and feet, have them trussed, and then throw them in a wine jar… A few days later, they died.
>
> 武后知之，促詔杖二人百，剔其手足，反接投釀罋中…數日死.[50]

Also, the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* mentions:

> Empress Wu [Wu Zhao] heard of it, and she was very angry. She sent people to give a beating of one hundred strokes each to Madam Wang and Madam Xiao, then to cut off [their] hands and feet, and then throw them in a wine jar…A few days later, [they] died. She also beheaded them.
>
> 武后聞之, 大怒, 遣人杖王氏及蕭氏各一百, 斷去手足, 投酒甕中…數日而死, 又斬之[51]

Consequently, there is a great possibility that Empress Wu ordered these cruel punishments. However, there is one logical error in the *New Tang History*. "*Zhao* (詔)," used in this text, is an emperor's order. At that time, Empress Wu as an empress could not issue a "zhao."

In addition, the *New Tang History* and the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* record problematic passages which also raise doubts about Wu Zhao's

---

[49] *Jiu Tangshu* 51, 2170.

[50] *Xin Tangshu* 76, 3474.

[51] *Zizhitongjian* 200, 6294.

cruelty. The two passages below in the *New Tang History* and the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* come after the passages about the punishments of Empress Wang and Pure Consort Xiao.

> Earlier, when the order [from the emperor] arrived; the empress [Wang] bowed twice, and said, "May his highness live ten thousand years. Lady of Bright Deportment [Wu Zhao] got your favor, and so I should die. It is my lot."
>
> 初，詔旨到，后再拜曰 陛下萬年, 昭儀承恩，死吾分也.[52]
>
> Earlier, Madam Wang heard the order, and she bowed twice, and said, "May his highness live ten thousand years. Lady of Bright Deportment [Wu Zhao] got your favor, and so I should die. It is my lot."
>
> 王氏初聞宣敕, 再拜曰, 願大家萬歲, 昭儀承恩, 死自吾分.[53]

For these passages, the explanation is that this event had happened when Empress Wang and Pure Consort Xiao received the emperor's order of a beating of one hundred strokes and of cutting off their hands and feet. In this way, the order was from the emperor, not from the empress Wu, although Empress Wu possibly affected the emperor's order. Some researchers insist that the record is not true. According to Rothschild, the description for Wu Zhao's cruelty is parallel with an incident concerning Empress Lu (呂后) in the Han dynasty (漢 B.C. 206- A.D. 220), so this

[52] *Xin Tangshu* 76, 3474.

[53] *Zizhitongjian* 200, 6294.

passage could be the result of historians' attempts to degrade Empress Wu by describing her barbarity[54] as follows:

> The empress dowager [Empress Lu] then cut off Lady Qi's hands and feet, took her eyes out, seared her ears… ordered [people] to call her the "human pig."
>
> 太后遂斷戚夫人手足，去眼，煇耳…命曰人彘.[55]

I assume that Empress Wang and Pure Consort Xiao received the order of a beating of one hundred strokes from the emperor whether or not Empress Wu influenced the order. The description of the cruelty, cutting off of hands and feet, was probably fabricated by the anti-Wu historians in order to degrade Empress Wu.

2.2.3. The reason and the way of "ruling from behind the curtain" (垂簾聽政)

Empress Wu started to participate in government in 660. In "Female Rulers in Imperial China," a great Chinese historian, Lien-sheng Yang, presents three conditions in order to rule "from behind the curtain." (垂簾聽政)

> a. When the emperor was very young.
> b. When the emperor was ill and unable to attend to affairs.
> c. When the emperor died suddenly or left a posthumous edict.[56]

---

[54] Norman. H. Rothschild *Wu Zhao: China's only woman Emperor*, (New York: Peters Longman, (2008), 39.

[55] *Shiji* 9, 397.

[56] Lien-sheng Yang. "Female Rulers in Imperial China" *Harvard Journal of Asiatic studies* 23 (1960): 51.

This peculiar ruling system was not unusual in Chinese history. The ruling system was first used by Empress Lu in the Han dynasty:

> Emperor Hui died, and the Crown Prince became emperor, (but because) he was young, the empress dowager participated in the government…
>
> 惠帝崩, 太子立為皇帝，年幼，太后臨朝稱制…[57]

Since Empress Lu, the regency of Empresses or Empress Dowagers occurred several times based on the conditions mentioned above.

The primary sources give two reasons for Empress Wu of the Tang to participate in government. The first, which is unreliable, is that the emperor was timid enough that Empress Wu could lead him. Only the *New Tang History* mentions this first reason and includes it in the biography of Empress Wu and of an official, Zhu Suiliang (褚遂良):

> The emperor was also timid and mentally turbid,
>
> 帝亦懦昏...[58]
>
> The emperor was turbid and timid so that he was led by Empress Wu…
>
> 帝昏懦，牽於武后…[59]

According to these passages, the emperor had a weak personality. Generally, the *New Tang History* records negative descriptions about Empress Wu. These passages

---

[57] *Hanshu* 3, 95.

[58] *Xin Tangshu* 76, 3475.

[59] *Xin Tangshu* 105, 4029.

also emphasize that Empress Wu, as a wife, did not stay in the home as she should; instead she disturbed her husband's work of government by asserting her influence over him. This situation shows deviation from the Confucian ideal of women. However, the details of the emperor's personality are only recorded in the *New Tang History*. In both of the *Old Tang History* and the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government*, there is no record related to the emperor's weak personality.

The other reason given is the emperor's illness. This reason is more credible with all of the three primary sources recording his disease.

The *Old Tang History* says:

> Since the Xianqing era (656-660), the emperor had suffered from a severe illness. When officials submitted memorials, [the emperor] entirely entrusted them for the Heavenly Empress to decide.
>
> 帝自顯慶已後，多苦風疾，百司表奏，皆委天后詳決[60]

Similarly, the *New Tang History* records the emperor's disease as follows:

> Since the Xianqing era (656-660), Emperor Gaozong had a severe disease. When officials submitted memorials, [the emperor] frequently ordered the empress to decide on them.
>
> 高宗自顯慶後，多苦風疾，百司奏事，時時令后決之[61]

The *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* precisely presents when he contracted his illness:

---

[60] *Jiu Tangshu* 6, 115.

[61] *Xin Tangshu* 4, 81.

> [In 660] winter, 10th month, the emperor first suffered with dizziness and severe headache. He could not see. When officials submitted memorials, the emperor sometimes let the empress decide on them.
>
> [顯慶五年] 冬十月 上初苦風眩頭重, 目不能視 百司奏事, 上或使皇后決之[62]

As stated by the passages, Empress Wu first participated in the government in 660 because the emperor was unable to administrate affairs due to illness. However, the emperor did not bequeath his power to Empress Wu.

In 664, after Empress Gaozong became seriously ill, she continuously participated in the government through a regency. In the *Old Tang History*, the basic annals of Empress Wu record her regency briefly:

> From that time, within the palace [she] assisted in governing for several decades, and her authority was not different from the emperor's. At that time, [the empress and the emperor] were called the Two Sages.
>
> 自此內輔國政數十年, 威勢與帝無異, 當時稱為 二聖.[63]

The biography of Empress Wu in the *New Tang History* and the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* describe her regency in detail:

> … Everyone called them the Two Sages. Whenever [the emperor] had court, a curtain was hung down in the middle of the throne room, and Emperor and Empress sat together on either side. Together they made decisions for allowing prisoners to live, condemning them to death, granting awards, and inflicting punishments.

---

[62] *Zizhitongjian* 200, 6322.

[63] *Jiu Tangshu* 6, 115.

> …皆曰二聖. 每視朝, 殿中垂簾, 帝與后偶座, 生殺賞罰惟所命[64]
>
> From this time, whenever the emperor did his business, Empress Wu sat behind a curtain in the back. In both great and trivial matters of government, both of them together listened to all matters. All of the power of the dynasty returned to the empress's royal quarters. Decisions for dismissal or advance, and allowing prisoners to live or condemning them to death came from the mouth [of Empress Wu]. The emperor folded his arms and he did not decide. Inside and outside people called them the Two Sages.
>
> 自是上每視事, 則后垂簾於後, 政無大小, 皆與聞之. 天下大權, 悉歸中宮, 黜陟, 殺生, 決於其口, 天子拱手而已, 中外謂之二聖.[65]

These three passages concur that Empress Wu's political power was the same as the emperor's, so that people called them the Two Sages.

However, it does not seem that they were of the same level. The emperor still had a higher position than that of Empress Wu. The *New Tang History* and the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* mention that Empress Wu often professed her opinions to the emperor:

> In 674, [Empress Wu] was called Heavenly Empress and presented twelve proposals…
>
> 上元元年, 進號天后, 建言十二事…[66]
>
> Heavenly Empress [Wu] offered her opinions to the emperor…
>
> 天后上表…[67]

---

[64] *Xin Tangshu* 76, 3476.

[65] *Zizhitongjian* 201, 6343.

[66] *Xin Tangshu* 76, 3477.

As illustrated above, Empress Wu could not make a ruling decision by herself; instead, she should propose her opinions to the emperor just like other officials. Although she was still lower than the emperor, Empress Wu's position was as high as the emperor to all of the officials, though there was still an apparent distinction between the emperor and the empress. The primary sources often record the emperor's illness from 660 to 683, when he died. I think that Empress Wu as an adviser behind a curtain was different from typical empresses. Then, the question of what the crown prince was doing during the emperor's illness remains. If an emperor could not govern his country, a crown prince sometimes replaced the emperor temporarily in Chinese history. The next section will examine this question.

2.2.4. The Death of Crown Prince, Li Hong

The Crown Prince, Li Hong was born in 652. While he was the first son of Wu Zhao, she would consider him not only as a son, but also as a means for improving and protecting her position. Li Hong became the Crown Prince in 656, one year after Wu Zhao became empress. In 660, when he was only eight years old, the emperor contracted his illness. Because Li Hong was too young to govern the country, Empress Wu had to participate in government indirectly from behind the curtain. With her support, the Crown Prince could sometimes participate in the government instead of the emperor for a few years. However, the Crown Prince also became ill with sickness in 671, according to the *Old Tang History*:

---

[67] *Zizhitongjian* 202, 6374.

> In 671… the Crown Prince had many illnesses…
>
> 咸亨二年… 太子多疾病…[68]

Due to his sickness and unsure future, the emperor could not entrust the crown prince with the power to govern. These records of the circumstances support the inevitable reasons for Empress Wu participating in government. The emperor, who thought her political participation was beneficial, attempted to entrust her with his governing power but his attempt failed due to the officials' opposition:

> The emperor suffered with severe dizziness. Then he consulted with officials regarding the possibility of the Heavenly Empress ruling as regent… [but] the emperor finally gave it up.
>
> 上苦風眩甚, 議使天后攝知國政…上乃止[69]

Probably, the emperor had thought that the most proper person to whom he could entrust his power was Empress Wu, instead of the Crown Prince or his other sons.

The Crown Prince finally died in 675. Although Ouyang Xiu believed that the Crown Prince was poisoned by his mother, Empress Wu, it seems that she did not poison her son, according to the *Old Tang History* and the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government*. The *Old Tang History* records this case as a natural death:

> In the summer, fourth month, the day Jihai, the Crown Prince, Hong, died at Qiyun Pavillion in Hebi Palace.
>
> 夏四月…己亥, 皇太子弘薨于合璧宮之綺雲殿[70]

---

[68] *Jiu Tangshu* 86, 2829.

[69] *Zizhitongjian* 202, 6375.

[70] *Jiu Tangshu* 5, 100.

> In 675, the Crown Prince followed [the emperor] to Hebi Palace, and died. He was twenty-four years old.
>
> 上元二年，太子從幸合璧宮，尋薨，年二十四[71]

Even though the death of the Crown Prince was mentioned in the *Old Tang History*, nowhere in the *Old Tang History* does it mention that Empress Wu poisoned the Crown Prince. However, the *New Tang history* records that Empress Wu poisoned her own son. Three passages in the the *New Tang History* record this murder case. They are basic annals of Gaozong, the basic annals of Empress Wu, and the biography of the Crown Prince Li Hong:

> Fourth month… the day Jihai, the Heavenly Empress killed the Crown Prince.
>
> 四月… 己亥, 天后殺皇太子[72]
>
> …Empress [Wu] was about to attain her intention, but Hong [the Crown Prince] gave opposing requests against the empress to the emperor several times. In 675, [Hong] followed [the emperor] to Hebi Palace, and was killed by poison. He was twenty-four years old.
>
> … 后將騁志，弘奏請數忤旨. 上元二年，從幸合璧宮，遇酖薨，年二十四…[73]
>
> …Empress [Wu] got angry, and poisoned Hong [the Crown Prince]
>
> …后怒, 酖殺弘[74]

---

[71] *Jiu Tangshu* 86, 2830.

[72] *Xin Tangshu* 3, 71.

[73] *Xin Tangshu* 81, 3589.

Charles P. Fitzgerald, a Chinese history expert, insists that the reason for her to kill her own son was that she had a desire to participate in government and have that power.[75] The *New Tang History* emphasizes Empress Wu's cruelty by recording this incident with the choking of her own daughter. In contrast, Sima Guang in the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* casts doubt on the murder case. He himself notes both of the records in the *Old Tang History* and the *New Tang History*:

> … on the day Jihai, the crown prince died at Hebi Palace. People that lived in that period suspected that the Heavenly Empress had poisoned him.
>
> … 己亥，太子薨于合璧宮, 時人以爲天后酖之也[76]

Following the passage, he gives a commentary about the case:

> *Research into Variances* (Kao yi) says that in Hong's death, the circumstances are inconclusive…[77]
>
> 考異曰… 按弘之死, 其事難明…[78]

Research into Variances (Kaoyi 考異) refers to *Zizhitongjiankaoyi* (資治通鑑考異) by Sima Guang. This document consists of thirty chapters. This document mentions textual differences among the previous primary sources. In the document, he compares several primary sources, and he finally mentions which source he chose to

---

[74] *Xin Tangshu* 76, 3477.

[75] C. P. Fitzgerald. *The Empress Wu* (London: The Cresset Press, 1968), 84.

[76] *Zizhitongjian* 202, 6377.

[77] For more explanation, see Denis Twitchett, "Chen gui and other works attributed to Empress Wu Zetian" *Asia Major 3rd ser.* 16, no. 1 (2003): 65.

[78] *Zizhitongjian* 202, 6377.

use in compiling the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government*. For the case of the Crown Prince's death, however, he just compared the primary sources, and he did not say which source he adopted. The passage above is the only one that reveals uncertainty regarding the death, among the various records of Empress Wu by Sima Guang. This means that he could not find any conclusive evidence to support that Empress Wu killed her son. He further surmises that she would not kill her own son to keep participating in government. Rather, there is one case in 670 showing that she was not addicted to her position as an empress and to the government:

> Due to the drought, Empress [Wu] requested her dismissal.
>
> 皇后以旱請避位[79]
>
> In the leap month, the day Guimao, due to the lasting drought, the empress [Wu] requested her dismissal, but her request was not accepted.
>
> 閏月, 癸卯, 皇后以久旱 請避位, 不許[80]

This case could be merely a necessary procedure that empresses should request their resignation as a formality whenever there is severe drought. However, I assume that if Empress Wu was addicted to participating in the government and having power enough to have killed her own son, then she would not easily request her dethronement even as a formality. Therefore, it can be strongly supposed that the anti-Wu historians probably fabricated the murder, and the crown prince died naturally.

---

[79] *Xin Tangshu* 3, 69.

[80] *Zizhitongjian* 201, 6365.

Table 5 records the tone of records about Empress Wu in the three primary sources: the *Old Tang History*, the *New Tang History*, and the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government*. It looks at each of the four cases discussed above. NA indicates negative descriptions, and NE indicates neutral descriptions.

	The *Old Tang History*	The *New Tang History*	The *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government*
The dethronement of Empress Wang	NE	NE and NA	NE and NA
The death of Empress Wang	NA	NA	NA
The ruling from behind the curtain (垂簾聽政)	NE	NE and NA	NE
The death of the crown prince	NE	NA	NE

Table 5: A comparison of the tone of records about the empress Wu in the three primary sources

This chapter looked through four topics that are still debated among academics. As a result, I conclude that the negative descriptions for Empress Wu related to the three cases of killing her own daughter, killing her own son, and ordering to cut off her enemies' hands and feet would not be true stories, but fabrications by anti-Wu historians. It is also reasonable to say that Empress Wu was not cruel, although she could be astute depending on the circumstances, and that her entrance into politics was not only by her will but was also inevitable due to

circumstances. Through several passages from the three primary sources cited in this chapter, I found that the *Old Tang History* and the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* generally keep neutral tones for the records of Empress Wu. The *Old Tang History* keeps the neutral descriptions about Empress Wu except for the records of Empress Wang's death. The *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* also keeps a neutral tone except for the records of Empress Wang's death. It seems that Sima Guang documented most of the possible records to support the cases which he could not evaluate, such as the case of Empress Wang's dethronement and the Crown prince's death. On the other hand, the *New Tang History* negatively records all of the four cases. With these results, three conclusions are possible: 1) The writers of the *Old Tang History* compiled records uninfluenced by their ideal of women. They took their material from other sources such as the Veritable Records of the Tang, and did not have time to add their perspectives to the document. Instead, the writers put their perspectives in the commentary sections. 2) By contrast, the *New Tang History* includes Ouyang Xiu's and Song Qi's Confucian perspectives. The document connotes their ideals of women based on their Confucianism. For this reason, the *New Tang History* started to include negative descriptions of Empress Wu. This document includes the most negative records about Empress Wu. 3) Sima Guang was a great Confucian scholar in the Northern Song dynasty who wrote *Precepts for Family Life* with his own ideal of women. He, however, did not include his Confucian perspective in the historical document, the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government.* According to his perspective as a

historian, it seems that he sorted the histories from the *Old Tang History*, the *New Tang History*, and other previous documents, and he compiled reasonable records from those documents.

CHAPTER III. BECOMING A FEMALE EMPEROR

This chapter will examine how Tang social conditions and Empress Wu's past political career could allow for the appearance of a female ruler. I will analyze how a female could rise to supreme power within the Confucian patriarchal system of Tang China. Also, I will re-analyze Empress Wu's history based on an analysis of the primary sources in the previous chapter.

3.1. Tang social conditions

In the period of the early Tang dynasty, neighboring dynasties of Tang China had several female rulers. Through Tang's tributary system, Tang had already been aware of female rulers in Silla (新羅), one of three dynasties in Korea, and of one kingdom of women in Tibet[81]. In addition, the *Old Tang History* and the *New Tang History* briefly record several kingdoms of women copied from *Journey to the West of the Great Tang* (*Da Tang xiyu ji* 大唐西域記) written by a notable monk, Xuanzang.[82] Due to the existence of these female rulers in neighboring dynasties and documents, the appearance of a female ruler during the Tang dynasty was not so difficult to accept by the Tang officials. Furthermore, Tang social conditions do not seem to have been as affected by Confucian patriarchy as Song society. Two factors

[81] Jennifer W. Jay, "Imagining Matriarchy: 'Kingdoms of Women' in Tang China" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 116, no. 2 (1996): 223-227.

[82] Ibid.: 221-223.

brought about this feature of the Tang dynasty: cultural influences from previous dynasties, and Tang imperial espousal of Taoism.

3.1.1. Cultural influences from previous dynasties

The previous dynasty, Sui (隋 581-618) was the first to have a unified empire since the division of the North and South Dynastues in 317. After the collapse of the Western Jin (西晉 265-316), during a period of about 260 years, China was generally separated into northern non-Chinese dynasties and southern Chinese dynasties. One of the last northern dynasties, the Northern Zhou (北周 556-581) conquered northern China, and the successor, the Sui dynasty, finally conquered southern China. According to the Qing scholar, Zhao Yi (趙翼) in *Critical Notes on the Twenty Two Histories (Ershiershi zhaji* 二十二史箚記), which ascertained twenty two Chinese histories in the Qing dynasty, Northern Zhou (北周 556-581), Sui, and Tang were originated from the same place, Wuchuan (武川), located in present-day Inner Mongolia.[83] Accordingly, the members of the ruling class of the Tang dynasty naturally retained northern Chinese characteristics although they had been sinicized for a while. The Northern Zhou was found by the Xianbei (鮮卑) tribe, which was one of the northern nomadic tribes. The period of about seventy years, from the

[83] Chae-sik Shin(신채식), *Dongyangsa gaeron* (*東口史槪論*, *The History of East Asia)* (Seoul: Samyoungsa, 1993), 290.

collapse of the Northern Zhou to the founding of the Tang, is not a long enough period for the ruling class to be sinicized perfectly.

Members of the Guan-Long aristocrats (關隴集團), who formed a political group in Sui and early Tang, held high positions during the Northern Zhou, Sui, and Tang bureaucracy until Wu Zhao became an Empress. To keep their political status, the group was opposed to Empress Wu, who was not in their group, and who replaced Empress Wang, who was in their group. The Guan-Long area is located in the northwest region of China "(primarily Shaanxi and Gansu), that is, the Northern Zhou area…"[84] Thus, the dominant officials of the ruling class in the Tang dynasty could have both Xianbei influences and sinicized characteristics.[85]

In addition, the reason the Tang dynasty could not avoid regional roots is that the Tang dynasty was an empire with multiple ethnicities, including those from Northern China. The historian of the Song, James T. C. Liu, examines cultural differences between the Tang and Song with the polo game. In his article, "Polo and Cultural Change: From Tang to Sung China," he says that Tang is a Han Chinese country with non-Han Chinese culture, including nomadic culture, which affected Tang court culture.[86] In nomadic societies, the status of women was much higher

---

[84] Victor Cunrui Xiong, *Emperor Yang of the Sui Dynasty: His Life, Times, and Legacy* (N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2006), 116.

[85] However, the Guan-Long aristocrats in the early Tang had weaker regional characteristics than the group in the previous dynasties because the aristocrats included officials who were not from Guan-Long area. In this paper, I name Guan-Long members and defenders as Guan-Long aristocrats for the sake of convenience.

[86] James T. C. Liu. "Polo and Cultural Change: From Tang to Sung China" *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 45, no. 2 (1985): 203.

than the status of women under agrarian societies. The status of women in the Tang dynasty was higher than that during the Song dynasty because the "hybrid culture loosened the hold of Confucian values on women in the early Tang."[87] There is one good example to prove that nomadic characteristics still remained in Tang society. Figure 1 shows that women rode horses, and wore trousers. Although unlikely to be a Tang painting, it portrays a Tang scene which displays their nomadic culture. [88] In the Song, women would not have been allowed to ride horses and wear trousers as depicted in this scene.

Figure 1: Consort of Guo going on a trip in spring (Guoguofuren youchuntu 虢国夫人游春图)[89]

[87] Norman. H. Rothschild, *Wu Zhao: China's only woman Emperor* (N.Y.: Peters Longman, 2008), 10.

[88] Hee-Jung Kang (강희정), "The Feminine Image of Bodhisattva in Tang Dynasty and Its Identity" *Misulsahak* 20 (2006): 28.

[89] Retrieved from http://www.libnet.sh.cn/art/ysjs/ghfz13.htm, on Dec. 9, 2007. As cited from Hee-Jung Kang (강희정), "The Feminine Image of Bodhisattva in Tang Dynasty and Its Identity" *Misulsahak* 20 (2006): 28.

3.1.2. Tang imperial philosophy

Furthermore, it seems that the Tang used Confucianism only as a political system while using Taoism as an imperial philosophy. Taoism generally prospered within the Tang royal palace. For example, the surname of the Tang royal family was the same as that of the founder of Taoism, Laozi (老子).[90] Gaozu (高祖 618-626) built a tomb for Laozi, and Gaozong (高宗 649-683) gave an honorary name to Laozi, Celestial Emperor Emeritus (Taishang xuan huangdi 太上玄皇帝). In addition, the *Daodejing* (道德經), which is a classic of Taoism attributed to Laozi, was as important as the Confucian canonical scriptures in the civil service examinations during the Tang dynasty.[91]

A monograph in the *Old Tang History* records the *Daodejing*'s importance as follows:

> From then on, the *Daodejing* was included in the major classics, and someone preparing for the civil service examination should also be conversant with the *Daodejing*.
>
> 自今已後，道德經並為上經，貢舉人皆須兼通.[92]

[90] He was considered the founder of Taoism. His name is 李耳, and the name of the Tang founder, Gaozhu (高祖) is 李淵. The royal surname Li was from the Longxi region (Longxi Lishi 隴西 李氏).

[91] Denis Twitchett and Howard J. Wechsler, "Kao-tsung (reign 648-83) and the Empress Wu: the inheritor and the usurper." In *the Cambridge History of China Vol. 3, Sui and Tang China, 589-906, Part I*, ed. Denis Twitchett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 265.

[92] *Jiu Tangshu* 24, 918.

Although Empress Wu had instituted Buddhism as the national religion, Xuanzong (玄宗 712-756) restored Taoism by constructing Taoist temples in local areas and keeping the *Daodejing* in each family house:

> When the commentary on the *Daodejing* of Laozi was finished, the edict said that every house should keep the book. Those preparing for the civil service examination subtracted *Shangshu (Classic of History)* and *Lunyu (Analects)*, and added Laozi [*Daodejing.*]
>
> 及注老子道德經成，詔天下家藏其書，貢舉人減尚書、論語策，而加試老子.[93]

For the status of women in the *Daodejing*, there are some arguments in academia. Some researchers insist that the *Daodejing* contains equal inter-relations between men and women, but others assert that the text shows women as superior to men.[94] For the ancient Taoism that developed from the *Daodejing*, Roger T. Ames, a great scholar of Chinese philosophy, asserts that Taoist thought presents no hierarchy between Yin and Yang, and between feminine and masculine.[95] Also, he cites a passage from a work of Joseph Needham, an accomplished scholar in Chinese culture, "If it were not unthinkable that the Yin and the Yang could ever be separated, one might say that Taoism was a Yin thought-system and Confucianism a

---

[93] *Xin Tangshu* 44, 1164.

[94] Insuk Kim (김인숙), "Junggukdogyoui yeoseongguan (중국도교의 여성관: 위진남북조를 중심으로, the view of womanhood of Chinese Taoism: focused on the period of Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern dynasties)" *Hoseosahak* 21-22, (1994): 175.

[95] Roger T. Ames, "Taoism and the Androgynous Ideal" in *Women in China : Current Directions in Historical Scholarship*, ed. R. W. L. Guisso and Stanley Johannesen (Youngstown, NY: Philo Press, 1981), 30-43.

Yang one."[96] It seems that these western scholars also consider the Taoist perspective toward women to be opposed to the Confucian perspective toward women.

Under these Tang social conditions, Empress Wu becoming the ruler was still not usual, but the incident was not impossible. Then, one question arises: Why was Empress Wu the single female ruler of the Tang dynasty? There was one other Empress who desired to be an emperor in the Tang dynasty: Empress Wei. She was Zhongzong's principal wife. Zhongzong was Empress Wu's son and retrieved the name of the dynasty, Tang, from the Zhou of Empress Wu. Empress Wei attempted to take the throne from Zhongzong by emulating Empress Wu.[97] Yuan Shu (袁樞), a Southern Song official, in his book the *Comprehensive Mirror Topically Arranged (Tongjian jishibenmo* 通鑑紀事本末*)*, considers Empress Wu and Empress Wei as similar phenomena. Accordingly, he combined the two empresses' records under one topic, "disasters caused by Empresses Wu and Wei (武韋之禍)."[98]

Nevertheless, the question remains: Why couldn't Empress Wei become another female ruler? There are several reasons. The major reason is that Empress Wu had a long period of ruling from "behind the curtain" and as an empress dowager. Empress Wu's role as a ruler from "behind the curtain" and as an empress

[96] Ibid., 22.

[97] Lianda Xu (徐連達), Haokun Wu (吳浩坤), and Keyao Zhao (趙克堯), *Zhongguotongshi (中國通史, Chinese history)*, trans. Jungguksayeonguhoe (중국사연구회) (Seoul: Cheongnyunsa, 1989), 378

[98] *Tongjian jishibenmo* 30, 1943-2014.

dowager covered a period of 30 years (660-690), until she became the emperor of Zhou. Gaozu (高祖) reigned for 18 years (618-626), and Taizong (太宗) reigned for 22 years (627-649). Compared to these lengths, Empress Wu's 30 years of the regency was long enough to learn national management and administration, and especially to gain solid political support. On the other hand, Empress Wei's period in the same role was only 5 years (705-710). Thus, the period of Empress Wei was too short for her to become another female ruler.

3.2. Empress Wu as an empress and an emperor

This section will re-analyze Empress Wu's history from a political perspective. I dealt with the historiography of her personality and private deeds. This section will analyze her political career. It is divided into three parts, analyzing each of Wu Zhao's positions and titles: consort, empress dowager, and emperor.

3.2.1. Empress Wu as a consort and an empress

When Wu Zhao entered the Tang palace as one of Taizong's consorts in 637, she received the title "Lady of Talents" (cairen 才人)[99]. Until Taizong's death in 649, she did not give birth and her status was not changed. It seems that during Taizong's period, she did not have any contact with political groups. Officials did not need to contact her for their benefit because the position of "Lady of Talents"

[99] There are some arguments about when she got 'lady of talents' title. Some scholars says that she got the title when she entered into the palace, but others insists that she got the title few years after entering into the palace.

was not a high position within the royal palace (see Table 6). The situation changed, however, in 655. Wu Zhao re-entered the Tang palace in 652, and she gave birth to sons in 653 and in 654. At the same time, the primary consort, Empress Wang did not give birth. In 654, Wu Zhao attained the position of 'Lady of Bright Deportment' (zhaoyi 昭儀). In the following year, Gaozong wanted to promote her to be one of his consorts (fei 妃), but the Guan-Long aristocrats opposed it, so that she could not get the higher position. The position of 'consort' (furen 夫人) is the highest position except Empress. If somebody who "was an outsider to the Guan-Long aristocrats,"[100] and who already had two sons were to become the next in line to the position of Empress, it would have threatened the Guan-Long aristocrats who had held their high position through the three dynasties as mentioned above. Table 6 shows the relative ranks of each consort title in the early Tang dynasty.

[100] Jo-shui Chen, "Empress Wu and Proto-Feminist Sentiments in Tang China" in *Imperial Rulership and Cultural Change in Traditional China*, ed. Chun-Chieh Huang (Seattle, London: University of Washington Press, 1994), 79.

Titles	Numbers of persons	Ranks	Orders
Empress (皇后)	1	No ranking	
Consort (夫人)	4	Rank 1, upper class (正 1 品)	Honored Consort (貴妃), Pure Consort (淑妃), Virtuous Consort (德妃), Worthy Consort (賢妃)
Nine Concubines (九嬪)	9	Rank 2, upper class (正 2 品)	Lady of Bright Deportment (昭儀), Lady of Bright Countenance (昭容) Lady of Bright Beauty (昭媛), Lady of Cultivated Deportment (修儀), Lady of Cultivated Countenance (修容), Lady of Cultivated Beauty (修媛), Lady of Complete Deportment (充儀), Lady of Complete Countenance (充容), Lady of Complete Beauty (充媛)
Lady of Handsome Fairness (婕妤)	9	Rank 3, upper class (正 3 品)	
Lady of Beauty (美人)	9	Rank 4, upper class (正 4 品)	
Lady of Talents (才人)	9	Rank 5, upper class (正 5 品)	
Lady of the Precious Bevy (寶林)	27	Rank 6, upper class (正 6 品)	
Secondary Concubine (御女)	27	Rank 7, upper class (正 7 品)	
Lady of Elegance (采女)	27	Rank 8, upper class (正 8 品)	

Table 6: Relative ranks of each consort title in the early Tang dynasty[101]

One of the Guan-Long aristocrats, Chu Suiliang (褚遂良) submitted a memorial that presents his group's thoughts:

[101] *Jiu Tangshu* 51, 2161-2162 Since Xuanzong (玄宗 712-756), the number of persons under each title declined. The translations of the titles are cited from Charles O Hucker. *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*. (Stanford: Stanford University press. (1985*).*

> If your majesty really wants to change empresses, I sincerely request that you cleverly choose one from honorable families in the country. Why should it be Wu?
>
> 陛下必欲易皇后, 伏請妙擇天下令族, 何必武氏.[102]

The empress position could be changed to someone from another group, but this would threaten Guan-Long aristocrats who did not want to lose their power. This passage shows that the Guan-Long aristocrats wanted the emperor to change the empress to one of their group, instead of somebody from outside like Wu Zhao, to preserve their status. A Tang history expert, Hwangja Choi, insists that because of this, Tang politicians were divided into two groups: the Kuan-Long aristocrats and all others[103]. For Wu Zhao's elevation to empress, she needed to replace Empress Wang's supporting group with others. Gaozong tried to promote her toward empress again, but the Guan-Long aristocrats still opposed it. Gaozong asked Li Ji (李勣) about it. Li Ji, who was one of the representatives of Wu Zhao's supporters, said:

> "Your highness, it is your family business. You should not ask outsiders." The emperor finally promoted Lady of Bright Deportment [Wu Zhao] to be Empress…
>
> 此乃陛下家事, 不合問外人. 帝乃立昭儀為皇后…[104]

After she became the empress, Empress Wu and her political supporters purged the Guan-Long aristocrats.

---

[102] *Zizhitongjian* 200, 6290.

[103] Hwangja Choi (최황자) (1986). "Tang Muchikcheongua jeongchijipdanseryoukui byounjil (당 무측천과 정치집단세력의 변질 T'ang Wu - tse - t'ien [Wu Zetian] and transmutation of the political system power)" *Junggukhakbo* 26 (1986): 101.

[104] *Jiu Tangshu* 80, 2739.

As a means to oust the Guan-Long aristocrats from their political positions, she supported the reformation of the civil service examination. Although previously examinations were given formally, most officials were selected through family connections. For this reason, the Guan-Long aristocrats were able to dominate high political positions for a long time. However, the reformation of the examination threatened their positions. According to *Mountain of Fame* written by John E. Wills, the reformed examination focused on knowledge and abilities about political, moral, and literary matters, not on family connections.[105] The examination became a major route to officialdom, and the positions which the Guan-Long aristocrats had held were gradually replaced by the newly enlisted officials through the civil service examination.

In addition, Empress Wu raised her own political power and support using religious rituals. Although she officially became empress, she needed unofficial approval by other consorts. For this reason, she supervised a sacrifice, Xian Can (先蠶) in which empresses worshipped deities of sericulture, representing household affairs, with consorts and women in the elite class.[106] The Xian Can sacrifice parallels the agricultural ceremony, the Jitian (籍田) ceremony, which was performed by emperors and male officials. Empress Wu performed the sacrifice four times between 656 and 683.[107] It can be argued that only four performances of the

[105] John E. Wills, *Mountain of Fame* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 138.

[106] Jo-shui Chen, 79.

[107] Ibid.

sacrifice during a 27-year period is infrequent. However, four times out of a total of eight for Jitian and Xian Can, the number of times both rites were performed during the entire Tang dynasty, was actually a high amount.

Moreover, there is other evidence that she also tried to raise her political status by performing the Fengshan (封禪) sacrifices. Fengshan sacrifices had political and religious meaning.[108] The sacrifices had been performed only six times during all of Chinese history.[109] The previous performance of the sacrifice was in A.D. 56, 600 years earlier.[110] In the Fengshan sacrifices, the emperor made the primary offering, and people who made secondary offerings were generally high officials.[111] However, Empress Wu offered the secondary sacrifice in 666.[112] That is, the secondary position changed from male high officials to the empress. There is no record that any woman had attended the sacrifices before the Tang dynasty, "The empress… planned to play a major role in order to lend legitimacy to her status as

---

[108] Howard J. Wechsler, *Offerings of Jade and Silk: Ritual and symbol in the legitimation of the Tang dynasty* (New Haven, MA: Yale University Press, 1985), 170.

[109] Jo-shui Chen, 84.

[110] Ibid p. 84, and Denis Twitchett and Howard J. Wechsler, "Kao-tsung (reign 648-83) and the Empress Wu: the inheritor and the usurper." In *the Cambridge History of China Vol. 3, Sui and Tang China, 589-906, Part I*, ed. Denis Twitchett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 259.

[111] Jo-shui Chen, "Empress Wu and Proto-Feminist Sentiments in Tang China" in *Imperial rulership and Cultural change in traditional China*, ed. Chun-Chieh Huang (Seattle; London: University of Washington Press, 1994), 84.

[112] "而以皇后武氏為亞獻..." *Tanghuiyao* (唐會要), 98, and "…皆以皇后為亞獻." *Jiu Tangshu* 23, 887.

equal partner with the emperor…" and she performed the secondary offering with consorts and female members of the royal family.[113]

Some scholars use Empress Wu's Xian Can performance and attendance of Fengshan sacrifices as supporting evidence that Empress Wu was a feminist reversing gender roles. Jo-Shui Chen also presents the changes of lengthening the mourning period for mothers and the change of the imperial consorts' titles as additional evidence of Empress Wu's feminism.[114] However, I think that attendance at Feng Shan sacrifices might not be a feminist issue. Twitchett mentions that officials discussed and decided on precise rules for the sacrifices because many of them hardly knew the rules.[115] Fengshan sacrifices had not been performed for about six hundred years, and the sacrifices were not performed frequently. It might be interpreted that the rules for sacrifices could be recreated every time depending on the social conditions that prevailed during the different time periods. Therefore, for Empress Wu's attendance at the sacrifices it can be considered that Empress Wu did not break any rules that were handed down with Confucianism, but that she affected the process of making the rules at the time in order that she could raise her own political power. It is also thought that if she did have feminist sentiments, she would

---

[113] Denis Twitchett and Howard J. Wechsler, "Kao-tsung (reign 648-83) and the Empress Wu: the inheritor and the usurper." In *the Cambridge History of China Vol. 3, Sui and Tang China, 589-906, Part I*, ed. Denis Twitchett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 259.

[114] Jo-shui Chen, "Empress Wu and Proto-Feminist Sentiments in Tang China" in *Imperial rulership and Cultural change in traditional China*, ed. Chun-Chieh Huang (Seattle; London: University of Washington Press, 1994), 80-88.

[115] Denis Twitchett and Howard J. Wechsler, "Kao-tsung (reign 648-83) and the Empress Wu: the inheritor and the usurper." In *the Cambridge History of China Vol. 3, Sui and Tang China, 589-906, Part I*, ed. Denis Twitchett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 259.

have nominated a princess for crown princess, instead of nominating a prince for crown prince. However, she actually declared Zhongzong as the crown prince, not the Taiping Princess as a Crown Princess:

> In 699, [he] was re-nominated as Crown Prince. The empress dowager was old and sick.
>
> 聖曆二年，復為皇太子．太后老且病[116]

She may have had feminist sentiments, but it is certain that her priority was using the changes to solidify her official status and raise her political power. Jay argues, rather, that "the power of dominance of the patriarchy was thus never seriously challenged by Wu Zetian's construction of her kingdom of Zhou."[117]

In short, reform of Tang ruling classes was necessary to Wu Zhao and her political supporters. The reformation caused the entrance of the newly appointed officials who were selected by examinations. After she became an empress, she tried to gain public approval of insiders and outsiders to the royal palace. Also, she made efforts at holding on to political power in order to keep her position as empress.

3.2.2. Empress Wu as an empress dowager

Empress Wu had the role of an empress dowager after Emperor Gaozong's death in 683. She may have had a desire to attain the position of emperor in this period. During this time, however, the power of Empress Wu was actually much

[116] *Xin Tangshu* 4, 106.

[117] Jenifer W. Jay, "Imagining Matriarchy: "Kingdoms of Women" in Tang China" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 116, no. 2 (1996): 228.

stronger than the power of the new emperor, Zhongzong. According to the testament of Emperor Gaozong, Empress Wu could still participate in governing:

> Emperor [Gaozong] left a testament that he was to be encoffined on the seventh day, and that the Crown Prince accede to the throne in front of the coffin… Any important military and civil matters still undecided should be given to the Heavenly Empress to settle.
>
> 宣遺詔. 七日而殯, 皇太子即位于柩前… 軍國大事有不決者, 取天后處分.[118]

Zhongzong, who became emperor, was the third son of Empress Wu. He was twenty-eight years old when Gaozong died. His age was enough for him to have control of the government by himself. Nevertheless, he was to ask Empress Wu's opinions regarding problems which were difficult to decide. Thus, the final decisions were given to Empress Wu. By this time, she ultimately had a higher position than her son, the emperor. There is another case that shows that Empress Wu's political power was more than the emperor's power. Zhongzong was dethroned by Empress Wu after only one month. Zhongzong promoted his father-in-law, Wei Xuanzhen (韋玄貞), to be one of the chief ministers. Zhongzong once said that he would give the dynasty to his father-in-law.[119]

> Zhongzong desired to appoint Wei Xuanzhen [his Father-in-law] to Director of the Chancellery… Pei Yan strongly disputed [his appointment], and Zhongzong said in anger "If I give the country to Wei Xuanzhen, what of it?"… [Pei] Yan was frightened and notified Empress Dowager of

[118] *Jiu Tangshu* 5, 112.

[119] John E. Wills, *Mountain of Fame* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 138-139.

> it. Then [they] discussed dethronement and enthronement in secret. Empress Dowager assembled officials at Qianyuan Pavillion… Empress Dowager ordered dethronement of Zhongzong…
>
> 中宗欲以韋玄貞爲侍中… 裴炎固爭, 中宗怒曰, 我以天下與韋玄貞何不可… 炎懼, 白太后, 密謀廢立. 太后集百官於乾元殿… 宣太后令廢中宗…[120]

This statement caused the emperor to be charged with treason. The process of the emperor's dethronement was conducted by Empress Wu and her followers. However, one question arises: If an emperor represents heaven under Confucian culture, whom did the emperor revolt against and under what right or power was he dethroned? It is probably the case that Zhongzong tried to revolt against Empress Wu. Although he had the title of Emperor, he still did not have political power as the emperor and could not escape from Empress Wu's influence. Richard W. L. Guisso points out that "she [Empress Wu] was beginning to resemble the usurping empress Lu of the Han" dynasty.[121]

Empress Wu had emperor-like political power during the period of the next emperor, Ruizong (睿宗), as well. Fitzgerald describes Ruizong's situation as follows:

> He did not occupy the usual Imperial apartments, and exercised no function of the throne. … all power was openly exercised by the empress dowager as if she herself had been the sovereign…

---

[120] *Zhizitongjian* 203, 6417-6418.

[121] Richard W. L. Guisso, "The reigns of the empress Wu, Chung-tsung and Jui-tsung (684-712)," in *the Cambridge History of China Vol. 3, Sui and Tang China, 589-906, Part I*, ed. Denis Twitchett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 291.

> Ruizong was not even present when state affairs were discussed, and was kept virtually a prisoner in the Inner Palace.[122]

While it is uncertain that he was actually imprisoned in the Inner Palace, this passage implies that though Ruizong's title was Emperor, he had no power, and Empress Wu had all the political power.

3.2.3. Empress Wu as an emperor

After 23 years (660-683) as an empress, and 7 years (683-690) as empress dowager, in 690, Empress Wu became an emperor and changed the name of the dynasty from Tang to Zhou (周). Confucians believed that it was the natural order that a male as representative of the yang aspect should become an emperor. If a female became an emperor, the incident would have broken the natural order, and it would have caused "catastrophic natural events and social disruption."[123] One of the Confucian classics, the *Book of Documents* (*Shangshu*, 尚書) warns people not to break the natural order with the following:

> The hen does not herald the dawn; when the hen crows to announce the dawn, it means that the family is only doomed.[124]

In opposition to this Confucian condition, Emperor Wu used Buddhism in order to justify herself as an emperor.[125] She especially used the *Great Cloud Sutra* (大雲經)

---

[122] Charles P. Fitzgerald. *The Empress Wu*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1968), 91.

[123] Diana Y. Paul, "Empress Wu and historians: a tyrant and saint of classical China," in *Unspoken world: Women's religious lives* ed. Nancy Auer Falk and Rita M. Gross (Belmont, CA:Wadsworth, 1989), 146-147.

[124] Norman H Rothschild. "Rhetoric, ritual and support constituencies in the political authority of Wu Zhao, Woman emperor of China" (PhD diss., Brown University, 2003), 53.

to counteract Confucian thought.[126] The *Great Cloud Sutra* identified her as the Bodhisattva Maitreya, who was actually a male "in a female apparitional form."[127] According to the *Great Cloud Sutra*, Empress Wu had a female appearance, but she was actually a male. This implication corresponded with the Confucian thought that only a male could be an emperor as a son of Heaven. Furthermore, the *Great Cloud Sutra* took steps to allay the anxiety about natural catastrophes and social disruption described by Confucian thought. The *Cambridge History of China* cites the text:

> Harvest will be bountiful, joy without limit. The people will flourish, free of desolation and illness, of worry, fear, and disaster…the rulers of neighbouring lands will all come to offer allegiance…. At that time all her subjects will give their allegiance to this woman as the successor to the imperial throne. Once she has taken the Right Way, the world will be awed into submission.[128]

In addition, Empress Wu legitimized herself as an emperor with the name of the Zhou dynasty (690-705). Actually, Zhou (周 or 西周 B.C. 1122-B.C. 770) was the utopian state of Confucians.[129] Confucians considered Zhou as a standard of

---

[125] She was actually a Buddhist and she made Buddhism a national religion when she founded the Zhou.

[126] Richard W. L. Guisso. "*Wu Tse-T'ien [Wu Zetian] and the politics of legitimation in T'ang China*" (Bellingham, WA: Western Washington University Press, 1978), 50.

[127] Dora Shu-Fang Dien, *Empress Wu Zetian in fiction and in history: female defiance in Confucian China* (Hauppauge, N.Y.: Nova Science Publishers, 2003), 46; Diana Y. Paul, "Empress Wu and historians: a tyrant and saint of classical China," in *Unspoken world: Women's religious lives* ed. Nancy Auer Falk and Rita M. Gross (Belmont, CA:Wadsworth, 1989), 150.

[128] Richard W. L. Guisso, "The reigns of the empress Wu, Chung-tsung and Jui-tsung (684-712)," in *the Cambridge History of China Vol. 3, Sui and Tang China, 589-906, Part I*, ed. Denis Twitchett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 305.

[129] Generally, the Zhou (周) is divided into two, the Western Zhou (西周 B.C.1122-B.C.770), and the Eastern Zhou (東周 B.C.770-B.C.250). The Confucians' utopian state was the Western Zhou.

utopian civilization and completion of feudalism, so that they yearned toward Zhou.[130] Moreover, she needed a new name since the Li family was no longer the ruling family. Therefore, from her perspective, the Tang dynasty had to end. This is most likely the reason that Emperor Wu changed the name of the dynasty to Zhou. The name change could have been a gesture in order to appease Confucians' opposition against a female ruler.

Most historians have considered Empress Wu, during the period of the Zhou, as a ruler during the Tang dynasty. From this perspective, it is certain that she broke the general succession to the throne, of father to son, and she killed many officials and imperial family members cruelly for her own security and power.

By contrast, it is possible to consider the period of Zhou as the period of a separate dynasty. The *Old Tang History* and the *New Tang History* say that Empress Wu changed the title of the Tang dynasty to Zhou:

---

[130] Cae-sik Shin(신채식), *Dongyangsagaeron* (*東口史槪論*, *The history of East Asia)* (Seoul: Samyoungsa, 1993), 34. There were four states using Zhou as a state's name: Zhou (B.C. 1122-B.C. 250), Northern Zhou (北周 556-581), Zhou (690-705), and Hou Zhou (後周 951-960). The Zhou founded by Empress Wu has been generally called Wu Zhou (武周).

… [She] changed the name of the dynasty to Zhou…

…改國號爲周…[131] …改國號周…[132]

Even though Zhou was maintained for only 15 years and had only one ruler, Zhou can be considered as one dynasty in itself. In Chinese history, there were several dynasties and states which were maintained for very short periods and had few rulers, just like Zhou. For example, the Qin dynasty (秦 221-207 B.C.) was continued for 14 years and had two rulers. The Former Yan (前燕 349-370) lasted 21 years and had two rulers. The Southern Yan (南燕 398-410) remained for only 13 years and had two rulers. The Sui (581-618) continued for 37 years with three rulers, and of the Five Dynasties (五代) out of the five dynasties and ten kingdoms (五代十國), none lasted more than 13 years and was ruled by more than four rulers.[133] The most similar case is one state during the period of Southern and Northern dynasties, the Eastern Wei (東魏 534-550), lasting 16 years with just one ruler. Because Chinese history already admitted these ephemeral states as dynasties, as mentioned above, it is thought that there is no reason that the Zhou dynasty of Empress Wu should not be admitted as a dynasty. It may be argued that the Zhou dynasty's institutions depended on the Tang, or rather were the same as Tang's institutions, so that there is no alternative but to categorize the Zhou as a part of the Tang dynasty. However,

[131] *Jiu Tangshu* 6, 121.

[132] *Xin Tangshu* 4, 90.

[133] The Former Yan and the Southern Yan were states during the period of Five Foreign Nationalities, and the Sixteen States (五胡十六國).

many states and dynasties in Chinese history had adopted the institutions of previous states and dynasties. For instance, the civil service examination was performed and never abrogated from the Sui to the Qing (1663-1911) and the examination was actually further developed and modified by several dynasties.[134] If the Zhou is considered as a dynasty of its own, Empress Wu can be described more positively. Empress Wu led a relatively peaceful transition from the Tang to the Zhou. In Chinese history, when most dynasties were founded, massive casualties were left as a result of the rise to power and as part of the transition to the next dynasty. The casualties who were killed by Empress Wu's group were relatively few. Her party killed several political enemies and royal palace members who were opposed to her and posed a threat, but not masses of civilians or military. In addition, Empress Wu's long political experience as regent would help her to quickly stabilize security both inside and outside the palace.

[134] Lianda Xu (徐連達), Haokun Wu (吳浩坤), and Keyao Zhao (趙克堯), *Zhongguo Tongshi (中國通史, the Chinese History)*, trans. Jungguksayeonguhoe (중국사연구회) (Seoul: Cheongnyunsa, 1989), 385-386.

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSIONS

It seems that for Chinese society, with its strong tradition of patriarchal culture, it is hard to accept Empress Wu as a female emperor, even though she named herself Emperor, founded a dynasty, and was unchallenged in power. Despite her political achievements, Confucian historians denied calling her Emperor. Therefore, it is possible that the historians negatively rewrote the records of Empress Wu. Only the *Old Tang History* includes her records in the basic annals as an emperor. Nevertheless, it calls her Empress, not Emperor. The *New Tang History* includes her records in the memoir section. It means this book never considered her to be an emperor, but uses her reign titles. Similarly, the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* also calls her Empress and uses her reign titles. Empress Wu's records by the Southern Song historian, Zhu Xi are the most hostile against Empress Wu. Zhu Xi's book considers her as a usurper against the Tang and does not use her reign titles, even when she founded the Zhou dynasty. Although, the former three documents seem to accept her as a ruler, none of the four documents admit the Zhou dynasty as a legitimate and separate dynasty, but they consider the Zhou dynasty as a part of the Tang dynasty, by including the Zhou dynasty within Tang history. In addition, the records of Empress Wu are inconsistent. Some documents describe her negatively, but others describe her neutrally. For this reason, it is not easy to judge what kind of person and ruler she was. Through the comparisons provided in chapter II, we can see that some of Empress Wu's negative records were possibly not true and fabricated by anti-Wu Confucian historians.

Empress Wu's appearance as a female emperor was not impossible under Tang social conditions. Tang society had strong influences from a previous nomadic culture. Women's status in nomadic culture was much higher than women's typical status under the traditional Confucian system. In addition, there were several female rulers in countries near the Tang. These influences gave women more freedom and power than under Confucian Chinese dynasties. Tang bureaucracy was also affected not only by Confucian ideals but also by Taoism. Under Confucianism, women's status within each social group was lower than that of men. On the other hand, women's status under Taoism was much higher than women's status under Confucianism. Because Taoism was the imperial philosophy during the Tang dynasty, the combined conditions made the appearance of a female emperor possible.

Between 683 and 690, Empress Wu might have begun to have the desire to become an emperor. However, she could not become emperor by herself. She needed additional power from political supporters. This paper does not include the relations between Empress Wu and the pro-Wu political groups, and the characteristics of these groups. Further study would evaluate whether Empress Wu really wanted to be an emperor or if she became an emperor by the will of her supporters. Either way, she founded a new dynasty, the Zhou dynasty. This dynasty can be identified as a separate dynasty from the Tang dynasty in Chinese history. Under this circumstance, she could be considered the founder of a dynasty who peacefully overthrew the previous dynasty.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ames, Roger T. “Taoism and the Androgynous Ideal.” In *Women in China: Current Directions in Historical Scholarship*, edited by R. W. L. Guisso and Stanley Johannesen, 21-45. Youngstown, NY: Philo Press, 1981.

Birge, Bettine. “Zhu Xi and Women’s Education.” In *Neo-Confucian Education: The Formative Stage*, edited by Wm Theodore de Bary and John W. Chaffee, 325-367. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989.

Chen, Jo-shui. “Empress Wu and Proto-Feminist Sentiments in Tang China.” In *Imperial Rulership and Cultural Change in Traditional China*, edited by Chun-Chieh Huang. Seattle, London: University of Washington Press, 1994.

Chen, Zizhan, ed. *Shijing* 詩經 [the Book of Songs] in *Shijing zhijie* 詩經 直解. Taipei: Shulin chuban youxian gongsi, 1992.

Cheong, Byung Jun (정병준). “Tangui janghyung: Jangsarl jungshimuro (당의 장형: 장사를 중심으로, Whipping Penalty during Tang dynasty: Centered on the Death by Whipping)” *Junggukgojungsesayungu* 2 (1996): 133-153.

Choi, Hwangja (최황자). “Tang Muchikcheongua jeongchijipdanseryoukui byounjil (당 무측천과 정치집단세력의 변질 T'ang Wu - tse - t'ien [Wu Zetian] and transmutation of the political system power)” *Junggukhakbo* 26 (1986): 91-107.

Davis, Richard L. “Chaste and filial women in Chinese Historical Writings of the EleventhV century.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 121, no. 2 (2001): 204-218.

Dien, Dora Shu-fang. *Empress Wu Zetian in Fiction and in History: Female Defiance in Confucian China*. Hauppauge: N.Y. Nova Science Publishers, 2003.

Ebrey, Patricia Buckley. *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993.

Fitzgerald, Charles P. *The Empress Wu*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1968.

Gao, Guokang (高國抗). *Zongguo gudai shixueshi gaiyao* 中國古代史學史概要. Translated by Sang Hun Oh, Gae Seok Lee, & Byung Han Cho (오상훈, 이개석, 조병한). *Zhongguo shixueshi ha (중국사□사 下, Chinese Historiography*), Seoul: pulbit, 1998.

Guisso, Richard W. L. *Wu Tse-T'ien [Wu Zetian] and the politics of legitimation in T'ang China.* Bellingham, WA: Western Washington University Press, 1978.

Guisso, Richard W. L. "The Reigns of the empress Wu, Chung-tsung and Jui-tsung (684-712)." In *The Cambridge History of China Vol. 3, Sui and Tang China, 589-906, Part I,* edited by Denis Twitchett, 290-332. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

Guo, Jianxun, ed. *Zhouyi* 周易 [the Changes] in *Xinyi Yijing duben* 新譯 易經 讀本,. Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1996.

Hucker, Charles O. *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985.

Jay, Jennifer W. "Imagining Matriarchy: 'Kingdoms of Women' in Tang China." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 116, no. 2 (1996): 220-229.

Jiang, Yihua, ed. *Liji* 禮記 [the Record of Rites] in *Xinyi liji duben* 新譯 禮記 讀本 ,. Taipei, Sanmin shuju, 1996.

Kang, Hee-Jung (강희정). "The Feminine Image of Bodhisattva in the Tang Dynasty and Its Identity (당대 보살상의 여성적 이미지와 그 정체성)" *Misulsahak* 20 (2006): 7-34.

Kelleher, Theresa. "Confucianism." In *Women in World Religions*, edited by Arvind Sharma, 135-159. NY: State University of New York Press. 1987.

Kim, Insuk (김인숙). "Junggukdogyoui yeoseongguan (중국도교의 여성관: 위진남북조를 중심으로, the view of womanhood of Chinese Taoism: focused on the period of wei, jin, and Southern and Northern dynasties)" *Hoseosahak* 21-22, (1994): 173-200.

Liu, James T. C. *Ou-Yang Hsiu: an Eleventh Century Neo-Confucianist.* Stanford: CA. Stanford University Press, 1967.

Liu, James T. C. "Polo and Cultural Change: From Tang to Sung China." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 45, no. 2 (1985): 203-224.

Oxford University Press. *The Oxford English Dictionary* 3. Oxford, The University Press, Oxford, 1961.

Park, Ji Hun (박지훈). “Songdai Sadaebuui yeoseongguan (송대 사대부의 여성관, Song Literati’s Concepts of Women).” *Zunggukhakbo* 46 (2002): 269-289.

Paul, Diana Y. “Empress Wu and the Historians: A Tyrant and Saint of Classical China.” In *Unspoken World: Women’s Religious Lives,* edited by Nancy Auer Falk and Rita M. Gross, 145-154. Belmont, CA:Wadsworth, 1989.

Pokyong Munhwasa. *Zizhitongjiangangmu* 資治通鑑綱目[the Outline and Digest of the General Mirror] Seoul: Pokyong Munhwasa 1987.

Rothschild, Norman H. “Rhetoric, ritual and support constituencies in the political authority of Wu Zhao, Woman emperor of China.” PhD diss., Brown University, 2003.

Rothschild, Norman H. *Wu Zhao: China’s only Woman Emperor*. New York: Peters Longman, 2008.

Sanmin shuju. *Tongjian jishibenmo* 通鑑紀事本末 [the Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government, topically arranged] Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1972.

Shanghai guji chubanshe. *Tanghuiyao* 唐會要 [Important documents of the Tang] Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1991.

Shin, Chae-sik (신채식). *Dongyangsa gaeron* (*東口史概論, The History of East Asia).* Seoul: Samyoungsa, 1993.

Twitchett, Denis. *The Writing of Official History under the Tang,* NY: Cambridge University press, 1992.

Twitchett, Denis. “Chen gui and Other Works attributed to Empress Wu Zetian.” *Asia Major 3rd ser.* 16, no. 1 (2003): 33-110.

Twitchett, Denis and Wechsler, Howard J. “Kao-tsung(reign 648-83) and the Empress Wu: the inheritor and the usurper.” In *The Cambridge History of China Vol. 3, Sui and Tang China, 589-906,* edited by Denis Twitchett, 242-289. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978.

Waley, Arthur, trans. *The Book of Songs* (詩經 Shijing). NY: Grove Press. 1996.

Wilkinson, Endymion. *Chinese History: a Manual*, Cambridge: MA. Harvard University Press, 2000.

Wills, John E. *Mountain of Fame.* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994.

Wechsler, Howard J. *Offerings of Jade and Silk: Ritual and Symbol in the Legitimation of the Tang Dynasty.* New Haven, MA: Yale University Press, 1985.

Xiong, Victor Cunrui. *Emperor Yang of the Sui Dynasty: His Life, Times, and Legacy.* N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2006.

Xu, Lianda (徐連達), Wu, Haokun (吳浩坤), and Zhao, Keyao (趙克堯), *Zhongguo tongshi (中國通史, Chinese history).* Translated by Jungguksayeonguhoe (중국사연구회). Seoul: Cheongnyunsa, 1989.

Yang, Lien-sheng. "Female Rulers in Imperial China." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 23 (1960-1961): 47-61.

Yao, Ping. "Precepts for Family Life (*Jiafan*) 家範, Sima Guang 司馬光." In *Images of Women in Chinese Thought and Culture: Writings from the Pre-Qin Period to the Song Dynasty*, edited by Robin R. Wang, 414-418. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co. 2003.

Zhang, Yu, ed. *Zizhitongjian* 資治通鑑 [the Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government]. Taipei, Shijie shuju, 1974.

Zhonghua Shu ju. *Hanshu* 漢書 [History of the Han]. Beijing: Zhonghua Shu ju, 1995.

Zhonghua Shu ju. *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 [the Old Tang History]. Beijing: Zhonghua Shu ju, 1995.

Zhonghua Shu ju. *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 [the New Tang History] Beijing: Zhonghua Shu ju, 1995.

Zhonghua Shu ju. *Shiji* 史記 [the Records of the Historian] Beijing: Zhonghua Shu ju, 1995.