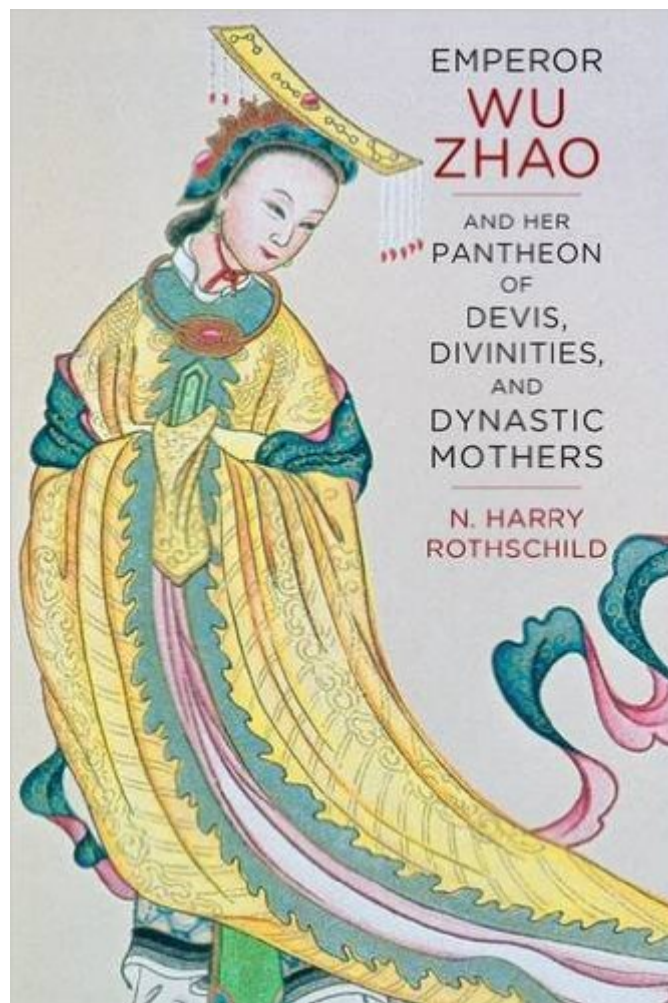


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Emperor Wu Zhao And Her Pantheon Of Devis, Divinities, And Dynastic Mothers (The Sheng Yen Series In Chinese Buddhist Studies)



Synopsis

Wu Zhao (624–705), better known as Wu Zetian or Empress Wu, is the only woman to have ruled China as emperor over the course of its 5,000-year history. How did she—in a predominantly patriarchal and androcentric society—ascend the dragon throne? Exploring a mystery that has confounded scholars for centuries, this multifaceted history suggests that China’s rich pantheon of female divinities and eminent women played an integral part in the construction of Wu Zhao’s sovereignty. Wu Zhao deftly deployed language, symbol, and ideology to harness the cultural resonance, maternal force, divine energy, and historical weight of Buddhist deities, Confucian exemplars, Daoist immortals, and mythic goddesses, establishing legitimacy within and beyond the confines of Confucian ideology. Tapping into powerful subterranean reservoirs of female power, Wu Zhao built a pantheon of female divinities carefully calibrated to meet her needs at court. Her pageant was promoted in scripted rhetoric, reinforced through poetry, celebrated in theatrical productions, and inscribed on steles. Rendered with deft political acumen and aesthetic flair, these affiliations significantly enhanced Wu Zhao’s authority and cast her as the human vessel through which the pantheon’s divine energy flowed. Her strategy is a model of political brilliance and proof that medieval Chinese women enjoyed a more complex social status than previously known.

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Customer Reviews

Wu Zhao became China’s first and only empress. She rose from obscurity to become the emperor much to the shock of the country. It was evident that she was a political genius because

she not only rose to the throne but also had a stable reign. One of the ways that she used her political acumen was through religion. She created a pantheon of female deities, and used them to help legitimize her reign. The author then divides the book into three faiths- Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. In each chapter, he writes about the specific deity and how she uses them to her advantage. While I was hoping to learn more about the life of Wu, I did find this book to be particularly interesting. I liked learning about these female goddesses, and I could see how they personally attracted Wu when she was empress and how she later used them as Emperor. I also liked as Zhao represented herself as these goddesses by having her as model for the goddess in the Buddhist temples. I also like how she also used poetry to help accomplish her goal. Overall, this book was about how Wu used religion to rise to the throne. This book is not really comprehensive, and it for scholars who know more about the history, politics, and religion of the Tang era, and the emperor Wu. Still it was interesting in how the myths of the goddesses helped Wu rise to the throne when the idea of a woman ascending the throne held much opposition. This book only covers a small part of how Wu rose to power and how she stabilized her reign, and it is a small glimpse of the complexities of the religion in the reign. This was great introduction into the three faiths that I really do not know a thing about until I read this.

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