

Women in the Imperial Household at the Close of China's Ming Dynasty: 1573–1644

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Abstract

Ming China's imperial household and the family system at its heart developed from the founding of the dynasty in 1368 until its end in 1644 through constant interplay among the powers of emperors, their male kin, imperial women and their families, court eunuchs, women servants in the palace and senior civil officials and their wives. The marriage system embedded within the imperial family limited the power and prerogatives of individual women, while maximizing the opportunities of each emperor to produce a legitimate male heir. In this context, this paper explores what various kinds of sources can tell us about the roles of women in the imperial household in the last seventy years of the dynasty. It highlights the political and cultural achievements of Empress Dowager Li (1546–1614), and explores the roles, responsibilities, and opportunities of some of the many women who worked within the household, including literate female officials, wet nurses, and other lesser palace women. All contributed to the achievements of the household and the family and to the rituals that reflected the culture and the political order of the imperial family, the household and the court.

Marriage, Monogamy, the Succession, and the Court: A Comparative Perspective

Throughout history, families and households have been organized to deliver social outcomes that enhance the ability of their members to survive, adapt to their environments, and pass on advantages to their offspring. The social structures within which women lived in the imperial household of China's Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) were designed to do all these things, but they did so in ways that were dramatically different from those of fourteenth- to seventeenth-century Europe, where societies of comparable wealth and complexity existed. They differed in significant ways, too, from other East Asian imperial families and households and from the ethnic majority Han Chinese and non-Han states that governed China in earlier and later periods. The household functioned through the interplay of the activities of emperors and their male kin, imperial women and their families, eunuchs, women servants, and the senior court officials and their wives. At the center of the court and the imperial household within it were the emperor and the empress, the symbolic father and mother of all in the empire. The marriage system that shaped their lives and the public expression through ritual of their wealth, power, and status in an intensely hierarchical society were at the heart of the culture and the politics of the court in the late Ming. Textual and material records of the life of Empress Dowager Li (1546–1614) provide an opportunity to examine how one late-Ming woman was able to adapt to and act within the family and household structures that both constrained and empowered her.



Fig. 1. Empress Dowager Li's court overvest, dated 1595, front view

Ming Imperial Marriages: Monogamy, Primogeniture and the Succession

At the start of the dynasty, the founding emperor had decreed a system of primogeniture similar to the European model in the importance it gave to the idea that only the son of a monogamously married wife should succeed to the throne.¹ After the reign of the founder, however, the position that became enshrined in the customary law of the dynasty was that, adopted in earlier Chinese dynasties, the son of the empress took precedence, but when the empress had no son, the emperor's eldest son by any woman should inherit the throne.² At the beginning of the Ming, the position of the empress had been strong and stable. The biographies of these women in the official history

portray them as wife, adviser, and counselor of the emperor and manager of his household. However, from the middle of the fifteenth century, emperors were often successful in deposing their first empress when it suited them and replacing her with a favorite consort. From this time onwards, it was unusual for one woman to be both empress and mother of the heir. A much more common pattern was for one woman to be empress, while another enjoyed the emperor's affection and still another was the mother of the heir.

The position of a Ming empress as a wife was weakened by the fact that, for a range of reasons, she often had no son, by the success of mid-Ming emperors in deposing their wives, by the fact that her male relatives depended on her position for theirs, by the high status accorded to her husband's other consorts and by the legitimacy of all the emperor's offspring. This weakened version of monogamy was accompanied in the mid- and late-Ming system by a version of primogeniture that was also weak when contrasted with the early-Ming system or with the systems of many other cultures. In the mid- and late-Ming system, the status of the principal wife of the emperor was separated from the inheritance rights of his sons. This diminished the status and power of the empresses, while strengthening the hands of lesser imperial consorts, especially if they were the mothers of sons who might contest the succession. It ensured that rivalry among imperial women was fierce and endemic and it empowered the civil officials of the inner court, who successfully asserted their right to define and interpret the rules that governed the succession, significantly eroding the powers of the imperial family.

In the Chinese state, the greatest possible importance, both secular and sacred, was attached to the idea that the throne must pass in the patriline down through an unbroken succession of male heirs. Even deviations to another branch of the founding emperor's lineage were regarded with the utmost gravity, as could be seen in the controversies of the Jiajing reign (1522–67).³ The ideology of the state depended on the emperor having a surviving son, or, in a worst-case scenario, a brother or cousin to succeed him and to continue the sacrifices to the imperial ancestors. This approach is in dramatic contrast to the succession rules and household structures of Europe in the same period, where inheritance by a child legitimately born to a monogamously married wife was the prevailing principle for royal families and the nobles at their courts. The natural limit to the number of children one wife could bear, coupled with high rates of maternal and child mortality, often meant that royal families were left without the desired male heir and so looked to the females of the same lineage and generation. The insistence on inheritance by the child of a monogamously married wife meant that, in the absence of a son, the lineage of a daughter was regarded as more important than her gender.⁴ In Europe, when there was no legitimate male heir, women of royal lineage succeeded their fathers as Heads of State in a way that was unthinkable in China.

Roles of Imperial Women in Late-Ming China

In China, both the imperial family and the families of the elite characteristically adopted a marriage pattern of monogamy or serial monogamy with concubinage in order to provide the strongest possible guarantee of a legitimate male heir to

inherit and carry on the sacrifices to the ancestors in each generation.⁵ For this purpose, the imperial household provided the emperor with very large numbers of potential sexual partners.⁶ Laura Betzig⁷ has drawn attention to one purpose of large harems such as the one at the center of the Ming imperial household. She argues that the rulers of intensely hierarchical societies are likely to maximize their own representation in the gene pool by maintaining large numbers of wives and concubines, while limiting or removing completely the opportunities of other men and women for successful reproduction. As I have previously noted,⁸ the mothers and grandmothers of emperors enjoyed both unassailable security of tenure and the same reproductive advantage as their sons and grandsons. Their daughters also reaped the benefits of being senior members of the imperial family. The hope of achieving such a position was a powerful motivating factor in the lives of imperial women. From the emperor's perspective, the sequestering of large numbers of nubile young women in a harem enhanced both his status and his reproductive advantage. Those elite households which imitated the imperial household, though on a smaller scale, also served to maximize the reproductive advantage of the heads of these households at the expense of their neighbors of lower status.

A key feature of the imperial-family system after the early Ming was that the children of lesser consorts were, for legal and inheritance purposes, regarded as the legitimate offspring of the principal wife. Such a system is in stark contrast to that of sixteenth-century England, where King Henry VIII struggled with the consequences of a strong version of monogamy. In Chinese commoner families, concubines could be regarded as lowly and expendable.⁹ This was not the case with imperial consorts. Though their status was always marked as clearly inferior to that of the principal wife, imperial consorts held ranks traditionally described as parallel to ranks in the civil service. They were honored members of the imperial family, with ritual and customary prerogatives to mark their rank and rich rewards for their natal families. This system meant that in Chinese dynasties, in stark contrast to European monarchies and despite high infant mortality, there was almost always a selection of legitimately born males of the correct lineage in each generation to inherit the throne.

When women entered the Ming imperial household, they were assigned to a carefully prescribed role. The most fortunate might immediately be appointed to the position of empress, principal wife of the emperor; others might be made lesser consorts to the emperor or consorts to one of the imperial princes. The vast majority of the women brought into the palace were appointed as servants attached to the service of a higher-ranking member of the household or to one of the household-service offices staffed by women. The role of each woman was carefully defined within the hierarchy of the family and the household. Nevertheless, there was potential for women to cross status boundaries and improve their positions within the hierarchy. Thus, women who had entered the palace with the status of a servant could rise to the position of empress dowager if they attracted the attention of the emperor and bore a son who lived to become emperor.¹⁰ Conversely, even women who had occupied the position of empress could be stripped of their titles and prerogatives and die disgraced and miserable.

After the early Ming, the women with the most secure positions in the imperial household were the mothers or grandmothers of a reigning emperor, who held the titles Empress Dowager and Grand Empress Dowager. The dowagers had important roles in managing the imperial family, including aspects of its household finances, the education of the young princes and princesses, and the selection of their marriage partners. The most successful dowagers were also intensely involved in the political activities of the outer court, as will be seen in the discussion of Empress Dowager Li, below. Furthermore, despite stern normative constraints on such activities, imperial women worked to promote the interests of their own kin, especially their sons, but also their daughters, fathers, and brothers.

With the exception of Empress Wu of the Tang Dynasty, Chinese imperial women in dynasties other than the Ming ruled only as regents when their husbands, sons, or grandsons were incapable of ruling for reasons of age or infirmity.¹¹ Through the successful fragmentation of imperial women's powers and prerogatives and intense normative pressure, despite some close calls, the civil officials of the Ming Dynasty succeeded in preventing all of its numerous and ambitious dowager empresses from establishing a formal regency.¹²

Estimates of Numbers of Women in the Palace

Despite the highly specified roles of many of the women who lived and worked in the Ming palace, their number is hard to estimate. The available biographies indicate that there may have been between twenty and a hundred titled imperial women at any given time. There were a minimum of 283 women officials in the service offices of the imperial household, and there clearly were in addition hundreds of maids, laundresses, wet nurses, women chair-bearers, who could not have bound feet, and other servants. There is little information on the numbers of women of low status whose work was essential to the running of the palace. Fulin, who became Emperor Shizu, the first Manchu emperor of China, stated that at the end of the Ming the palace had been staffed with 9,000 women and 100,000 eunuchs. Like the Ming founder before him, however, he was anxious to contrast the modesty of his own requirements with the extravagance of his predecessor. His own establishment, he went on to say, was not to exceed 400 or 500 persons.¹³ The late-Ming Jesuit observer Alvaro Semedo estimated that there were 3,000 women and 12,000 eunuchs living in the Ming palace in about 1626.¹⁴ Semedo's estimates can only have been based on hearsay, but they were made without the same political intent and thus are more likely to be reliable than those of Emperor Shizu.

Social Backgrounds of Imperial Women

A further important feature that distinguished the Ming imperial family from other Han Chinese and non-Han systems is that women were recruited into the palace from families of relatively low status.¹⁵ This is in contrast to the situation in Tang and Song China, when the empresses were often the sisters or daughters of civil and military officials who held high rank in their own right. Lee Hui-shu¹⁶ has highlighted the obscure social origins of Empress Yang, wife of the Song Emperor Ningzong, but it is clear that her modest family background

was the exception. Under the Mongols (1260–1368), different marriage and inheritance practices prevailed, but the wives of the emperors were generally selected from the families of prominent military families. In the Qing period, only the Manchu Banners could provide women for the imperial household.¹⁷ The Banners were the basic social-administrative units which supplied the state with men for military service and women for service in the palace.

While as Jennifer Holmgren¹⁸ has pointed out, a range of strategies was employed in both the Han Chinese and non-Han dynasties that ruled China to prevent the dominance of any one woman in court politics, no previous dynasty set out to select imperial women from the daughters of commoner families. The Ming founder¹⁹ decreed that the wives of the princes should be selected from “good families,” whose fathers held no official or noble position. He reiterated this principle in 1397 when he stated that the daughters of the rich and powerful would be systematically excluded from the selection.²⁰ While in practice, after the early Ming, imperial women were regularly recruited from military families, these were characteristically families of modest means who owed the high positions they later attained to the position of their daughter at court, not the other way around. A common formula in describing the positions is that the men were “honored because of their daughter.” This was the case with the family of the Wanli Emperor’s mother, Empress Dowager Li. When her son was appointed heir apparent in 1568, her father was made Vice Commissioner-in-Chief of a central military commission and Earl of Wuqing. When her son became emperor in 1572, her father’s noble title was raised to Marquis of Wuqing. The natal families of Ming empresses did not have power bases that could help to protect their daughters’ positions, and these families, like their women, were regularly at risk of losing their positions.

Women Officials in the Imperial Household

At the beginning of the dynasty, the Ming founder established six services, offices within the imperial household staffed by women officials and charged with governing the women’s quarters. The descriptions of the positions of women within these services were based on the ancient ritual text, the *Rites of Zhou*, and on the official histories of the Sui and Tang Dynasties.²¹ The women officials were each given a rank parallel to a rank in the civil service. The highest-ranking women were the two heads of the General Palace Service and the head of the Office of Palace Staff Surveillance, who held civil-service rank 6a, equivalent to a mid-level male civil official. The roles of each of the services were spelled out in detail. The women officials were charged with the transmission of some documents and with keeping the records of the names, titles, native places, and family backgrounds of imperial women for later incorporation into burial tablets or the draft biographies of the most prominent women, which were written by the (male) court historians. Women officials organized and participated in all the rituals that involved the women of the imperial family and the wives of the court officials.²² They were involved in the disbursement of funds to the families of all the women who served in the palace and the provision of food, wine, textiles, needlework, clothing, and headgear. The Office of Palace Staff

Surveillance investigated infringements of palace regulations and imposed fines and punishments.

The detailed prescription of the ranks and duties of the women officials that appears in the official history of the Ming Dynasty²³ has a long history. The Tang Dynasty account of their ranks and duties is very similar to that given in the Ming history. Priscilla Ching Chung²⁴ and Lee²⁵ have described aspects of the Song Dynasty system which also overlap with the Ming. The lineage of the Ming description of offices can be traced even more precisely, however. The account of the women officials of the Jin Dynasty (1115–1234) is almost identical to the Ming account.

The account in the *Draft Treatise of the Ministry of Rites* of 1620, compiled near the end of the dynasty, differs little from that published at the beginning of the dynasty. Thus, the description of these offices remained almost unchanged over a period of five hundred years. There are some small changes and developments in the prescriptions for the formal structures but this is probably very much less than the amount of actual change in functions that took place over this long period.

As servants and advisers in the inner court, women officials both competed with and cooperated with the eunuchs, whom emperors found indispensable as administrators, private secretaries, transmitters of documents between the palace and the officials of the outer court, keepers of the imperial treasury, procurers of goods, and personal representatives in many kinds of financial and political transactions, both within the empire and beyond.²⁶ The official history records that the services staffed by eunuchs came to dominate those staffed by women and that “[a]fter the Yongle period [1402–24], all the responsibilities (of the six services) were transferred to the eunuchs and only the four offices of the Seals and Tallies Office remained.”²⁷

Throughout the Ming Dynasty, however, seals and tallies were required to authorize the use of cash and goods of all kinds within the palace and were thus at the heart of every financial transaction in the imperial household. These objects were emblems of the authority of the person who authorized the expenditure. A seventeenth-century eunuch, Liu Ruoyu (1584–ca.1642), has left a valuable unofficial account of some aspects of daily life in the palace. He makes it clear that at least some of the offices staffed by women continued to function into the late-Ming period. According to his account, one of the twelve eunuch directorates of the late-Ming system was called the Directorate of Seals and Tallies and one of its subsidiary offices was the Inner Office of Seals, which was staffed by the women officials. He gives the following account of its function:

All the seals were in the charge of the women officials of the inner office of seals. When a seal was required, the Office of Seals informed the Directorate of Seals by sending them a card. The Directorate requested authorization and then instructed the Inner Office to bring the seal.²⁸

The School for Palace Women

Literate, educated women officials were often recruited from outside the palace, but in the Yongle period a school for young women was set up within the palace itself. A number of men with Confucian educations were persuaded to

allow themselves to be castrated so that they could enter the palace to instruct the ladies of the court.²⁹ Liu Ruoyu's account shows that by late-Ming times the school for palace women, staffed by eunuchs, had a fixed curriculum and standard techniques for evaluating its students. The eunuch teachers were chosen from among the staff of the twenty-four eunuch directorates. The criteria for their selection were that they should be virtuous, well-read, good calligraphers in the standard *kaishu* style, and that they should not be powerful.³⁰ There was a set curriculum to be followed in this school. Students were first taught to read the *Hundred Surnames* and the *Thousand Character Classic*, the standard primers used for teaching children embarking on the long road to literacy in Chinese. Subsequently, they read the *Classic of Filial Piety*, the *Admonition for Women* by Ban Zhao of the Han Dynasty, and the *Instructions for Women* by the Jiajing Emperor's mother. They went on to study the "Pattern of the Family" section of the *Book of Rites*, the *Book of Poetry*, the *Great Learning*, the *Doctrine of the Mean*, and the *Analects*. Those who mastered these works were given the title "women graduates." These women were then available for appointment as Bearers of the Seals in the Office of Palace Attendance or in one of the six services.³¹

The Laundry Service

In addition to the six services, there were several other agencies of the emperor's household staffed by women. One of these was the Laundry Service. Located to the northwest of the imperial city, it was the only department of the imperial household located outside the imperial city. Palace women who were old or ill or who had committed crimes were sent there to live out their days. The Laundry Service was under the direction of eunuch supervisors. According to Liu, they kept the women supplied with basic rations of rice and salt until they died of natural causes; the women were not allowed to leave the Laundry Bureau alive, "in order to guard against the divulging of secrets."³²

Imperial Wet Nurses

Another special group of women were also administered by an agency staffed by eunuchs. These were the imperial wet nurses. Outside the imperial city to the north of the Dongan Gate were the headquarters of the Office of Rites and Propriety. The office was attached to the Embroidered Uniform Guard and was supervised by the powerful eunuch Director of Ceremonial. One of the responsibilities of the eunuchs in this agency was to recruit between twenty and forty lactating women in each quarter of the year.³³ Local officials were required to supply an additional eighty such women each year to be kept in reserve.

Early in the year, officials and eunuchs began the search for lactating women among the military and commoner families in the vicinity of Beijing. They were to be between the ages of fifteen and twenty *sui* [about fourteen to nineteen years old in the Western system of calculating ages] and both they and their husbands were to be healthy and normal in appearance. Midwives examined the candidates to determine that they were free from disease and then handed the chosen ones over to the eunuchs, who provided them with accommodation until they were needed in the palace. Each wet nurse received a substantial daily allowance of rice and meat.³⁴ Although the sources do not mention this, it must

have been essential that the wet nurses kept their babies with them during this period of waiting to maintain lactation.

During a month when a child was expected in the palace, a few wet nurses who had themselves borne male children and a few who had borne female children were taken to live in a small building west of the Hall of Literary Brilliance beside the palace moat. If the emperor's child were female, a wet nurse who had borne a male was used. If the emperor's child were male, a wet nurse who had borne a female was selected. No explanation is given for this practice. On the day on which she was to enter the palace, the woman's hair was done in a high coif and she was dressed in the fashion of a palace woman. Thus attired, she entered the palace to take up her duties. Nothing is said of what, if any, provision was then made for the nurses' own children.

By the beginning of the seventeenth century, the orderly system for the recruitment of wet nurses, if indeed it had ever functioned as prescribed, was under severe pressure. Because of the prestige associated with being the nurse of an imperial infant and the opportunities it provided for advancing the interests of one's own family, there was intense competition for the positions, and the official system was often bypassed by those who had influential connections. Village women chosen in the prescribed way had no hope of success and "the roads were thronged with protégés and their promoters."³⁵

Recent studies of elite women in Britain and France show that their use of wet nurses can be seen as part of a reproductive strategy that enabled some of them to give birth to twenty or more children over their lifetimes.³⁶ The available evidence shows that Ming imperial women, by contrast, did not use wet nurses to increase their own fertility. The titled imperial women who were important enough to merit biographies and who may all be assumed to have had access to wet nurses, gave birth to an average of only 1.8 children. Most of them had one child, two children, or none at all.³⁷ A more likely rationale for the use of wet nurses was to mark the high status of the mother and to spare her the physical challenge of breastfeeding an infant.³⁸

During the reign of the Tianqi Emperor (r. 1620–27), Empress Dowager Li had died and the imperial household was without a powerful empress dowager. The empress was weak and she had no children. In addition, the emperor himself was ill-prepared for his role and withdrew from it to a remarkable degree. In this situation, and in concert with the eunuch Wei Zhongxian (1568–1627), the emperor's former wet nurse, Madame Ke (d. 1627), was able to move well beyond the usual comforts and largesse that were accorded to women in her position and to contest dominance in the imperial household and the inner court. She was bold enough to spread malicious rumors about the empress's father, and she and Wei persecuted other imperial women to death. They are accused in the official Ming history of having forged a decree from the ill-fated Taichang Emperor, who reigned for less than a month in 1620, ordering one of his young consorts to commit suicide. The young woman, who had not yet even been invested with a title, took all the things the emperor had given her and arranged them on a table in front of her. Facing west, she made reverence to the Buddha and then, weeping bitterly, took her own life. Another of the Tianqi Emperor's own consorts offended Wei and Madame Ke by her "direct and high-principled

nature." They confined her in a separate palace and cut off supplies of food and drink. She died after crawling on her hands and knees in the rain to drink the run-off from the eaves of the palace.³⁹ Madame Ke had relied for her authority on her relationship with her former charge, the Tianqi Emperor, and when he died in 1627, her authority evaporated. Once powerful enough to challenge even the empress, she was sent for punishment to the Laundry Bureau, where she was beaten to death.

Ming Imperial Women and Ritual

Ritual was among the most important daily concerns of all the inhabitants of the Ming court, who were sensitive to the subtlest nuances of the status distinctions marked by ritual. Emperors were taught through ritual to see their role as the vital link between heaven and earth. On a practical level, they were also aware of the importance of ritual in affirming the legitimacy of their rule and in maintaining their authority over an empire whose governance sorely taxed the resources of the state.⁴⁰ As a result of the centrality of ritual in the politics of the court, many of the fiercest controversies of the dynasty involved ritual matters.

For the women of the imperial household, rituals affirmed the symbolic importance of the empress as the emperor's wife, titular mother of all his children, and exemplar of feminine virtue to the empire. Rituals marked every important event in the lives of imperial women. There were rituals for marriage and the investiture of the empress and the consorts, rituals to celebrate the birth of children, banquets and festivals when imperial women received the congratulations of the wives of the senior officials. The granting of honorific titles, funeral rites, and places in the ancestral temples marked the status distinctions among imperial women and defined the meaning of their lives and their deaths. Ritual was the battleground for arguments about status and prerogatives, with success dependent on the support of the emperor, the eunuchs, and the civil officials. Directly or through their supporters, women negotiated about matters such as honorific titles, places in the halls for ancestral sacrifices, and places in the imperial tombs.

Because of the political importance of the program of ritual for the dynasty, it was continually refined and developed, closely watched by all members of the court who stood to gain or lose from any changes. In designing the program, the officials of the Ministry of Rites drew on all three of the ancient classics of ritual, the *Rites of Zhou*, the *Book of Ceremonial*, and the *Book of Rites*. The rituals of the Ming were also modelled on Tang and Song Dynasty precedents. Rituals were divided into five broad categories, three of which were important for imperial women. The first of these categories were the auspicious rites. These were the sacrifices of the state and the sacrifices to the imperial ancestors. Five of the auspicious rites of Ming times involved imperial women: the sericulture ceremony, the sacrifice to Gao Mei, and the sacrifices in the Imperial Ancestral Temple, the Hall for Ancestral Worship, and the Temple for Ancestral Compassionate Mothers. Women were also involved in the festive rites including court audiences, banquets, the investitures of empresses and consorts, and weddings and births. The inauspicious rites included funerals and mourning and

here again imperial women had key roles to play. In all of these rites, they were prepared, accompanied and attended by the women officials.

Women's Places in the Halls for Ancestral Worship

The most public and important of the auspicious rites were the state sacrifices in the Imperial Ancestral Temple. This was the temple outside the palace walls where the dynastic sacrifices of the state were offered. It contained a room for the spirit tablets of each imperial ancestor, each emperor, and each emperor's first principal wife. This practice had precedents from the Song Dynasty and the Ming founder intended that it should be followed throughout the dynasty. In practice, however, two Ming emperors succeeded in putting aside this precedent. The Xuande Emperor (r. 1426–36) and the Chenghua Emperor (r. 1465–88), who deposed their first empress and installed other women in their place, argued that the second empress was, in fact, the rightful principal wife. Both managed to have the deposed wife excluded from the Imperial Ancestral Temple and the new wife installed.

Later in the dynasty, the Jiajing Emperor (r. 1522–67) decided to provide a place in the Imperial Ancestral Temple for Empress Fang, his third empress. His officials were vehemently opposed, however, and when he died, his first principal wife, with whom he had quarrelled violently, was given the place, while Empress Fang's spirit tablet was relegated to another hall.⁴¹ In spite of the early- and mid-Ming exceptions, Ming-dynastic practice upheld the principle that in the Imperial Ancestral Temple there could be only one emperor and one empress, and that the empress must be the first principal wife. Throughout the Ming, a place in this temple remained, jealously guarded, as the highest honor to which an imperial woman could aspire.

In a departure from earlier precedent, the Ming founder had ordered the establishment of a second hall, the Hall for Ancestral Worship, where sacrifices to the imperial ancestors were also carried out. This hall was located within the walls of the palace and was intended for family sacrifices, as distinct from dynastic or state sacrifices. Every morning and every evening, the emperor or one of his male descendants performed sacrifices and the empress and consorts also made daily offerings there.⁴² Births, deaths, and marriages were announced to the ancestors there and, from the Jiajing period onwards, most of the major festivals of the lunar calendar were also celebrated there.

According to the official history, up until the Wanli period (1573–1620), the selection of the women who were to be accorded a place in the family Hall for Ancestral Worship was not a contentious issue. Each empress who received a place in the Imperial Ancestral Temple also received a place in the Hall for Ancestral Worship.

In the third year of the Wanli Emperor's reign, when he was just a boy of thirteen, he took the initiative in reopening the controversy concerning the honors due to the wives of his grandfather, the Jiajing Emperor. The young emperor suggested that Empress Fang, his grandfather's third principal wife, and Empress Dowager Du, the mother of the Longqing Emperor (r. 1567–73), should both be honored in the Hall for Ancestral Worship. The emperor revealed to the officials that the spirit tablets of three women who had been the natural

mothers of emperors, but had never been empress, were already being honored there. The arrangements for this, he said, had been made secretly without the knowledge of the officials, who had no access to this part of the palace. The young emperor invited Grand Secretary Zhang Juzheng to come to the hall to see for himself. Zhang observed that the Hall for Ancestral Worship was intended to be a place where emperors and their wives were honored and that all those women who had been granted the title of empress should find a place in this inner hall. He argued that the granting of places there should be separate from the system in the Imperial Ancestral Temple, where, he reiterated, there could be only one emperor and one empress.⁴³ The boy emperor's campaign on behalf of the natural mothers of previous emperors was surely the opening salvo in a campaign, which never did succeed, to secure a place in the Hall for Ancestral Worship for his own mother, who was "only" a natural mother and had never been empress.

A final irregularity in the allocation of places in the Hall for Ancestral Worship occurred near the end of the dynasty. Lady Wang, the natural mother of the Tianqi Emperor, was given a place there after her son ascended the throne in 1620.⁴⁴ For the most part, however, Ming emperors were unsuccessful in their efforts to have second empresses or the natural mothers of emperors included in the sacrifices in the Imperial Ancestral Temple and the Hall for Ancestral Worship. In 1488, a new temple, the Hall for Ancestral Compassionate Mothers, had been established for these women. This solution to the problem prevailed through the next fifty years until, in 1537, the rites officials argued that it was both unnecessary and improper to continue the sacrifices to the natural mothers of emperors through the generations. These sacrifices should really only be carried out by the women's sons and allowed to lapse in later generations. The Jiajing Emperor was persuaded and the temple for offerings to natural mothers was abolished. After this, the natural mothers of emperors were honored in several ancillary halls, including the Hall of Expansive Filial Piety, the Hall of the Spiritual Emyrean, and the Hall for the Veneration of the Ancestors and in the temples at the imperial tombs. Ming emperors never ceased to negotiate improved ritual positions for their natural mothers. The last Ming emperor gave instructions for the establishment of a new temple to honor all the women who had been second empresses or natural mothers of emperors, including his own mother. The name of the hall is not recorded, however, and it is unlikely that it was completed before the many internal and external challenges to the dynasty brought about its fall in 1644.⁴⁵

Court Audiences and Banquets for Women

Ming empresses did not receive the congratulations of the civil officials at public audiences as empresses had under the Tang. Their public audiences were attended by women only. On New Year's Day, at the winter solstice, and on their birthdays imperial women of the rank of empress, empress dowager, and grand empress dowager received the congratulations of the titled ladies of the inner and outer courts. On the days appointed for the empress to receive the congratulations, a throne was set up in her official residence, the Palace of Earthly Tranquillity. The imperial insignia were displayed and, as female

musicians played, the imperial consorts approached in order of rank and made their obeisances to the empress. Each one in turn identified herself and offered her congratulations. Next, the wives of the nobles and the officials came forward, identified themselves and congratulated the empress. These titled ladies of the outer court, the wives of the senior metropolitan officials, all had ranks and clothing decorated with insignia carefully prescribed to show where their husbands stood in the hierarchy of the capital's officials. The ceremony also included the reading by the female officials of an edict and a reply by the titled ladies.⁴⁶ Often, when the emperor entertained his officials at state banquets, the empress held parallel banquets for their wives, usually in her residence. The titled ladies offered "long-life flowers" to the empress. In return, she offered them wine seven times and the food was served in five courses, in contrast to the emperor's banquets, where the wine was offered nine times.⁴⁷

In the reign of the last Ming emperor, an incident occurred which illustrates the way such ceremonies could feature in the relationships of the participants. One New Year's Day, the last Ming emperor's consort, Lady Tian, went to the empress's residence to pay her respects to the empress. At the time, Lady Tian was very much loved by the emperor and the empress, herself the mother of healthy sons, felt the need to bring home to her rival the limits of her position. The empress kept the consort waiting for some time before ascending her throne to receive her, and then accepted her congratulations in a perfunctory fashion. But when another consort, Lady Yuan, arrived later, the empress pointedly took the time to greet her and speak with her at some length. Lady Tian was humiliated, as it was intended she should be.⁴⁸ At a more basic level, a woman's status and ritual prerogatives determined how she was treated, down to the quality and amount of food and drink and the number of attendants to which she was entitled. When the eunuch Wei Zhongxian and Madame Ke failed to observe the protocols required by ritual in their treatment of the Taichang Emperor's Lady Li, her death ensued.⁴⁹ Again and again, women's biographies in the official history make it clear that, for them, ritual was not a peripheral matter. It was central to their position in the politics of the court and often a matter of life and death.

Empress Dowager Li and the Wanli Court

Empress Dowager Li (1546–1614), the Wanli Emperor's mother, was the most successful and influential of late-Ming dowager empresses. Like many Ming empresses and dowager empresses before her, she was active both within the imperial family and household and in the politics of the outer court. When Censor Cao Xuecheng was condemned to death for sedition, she took pity on his elderly mother and interceded with the emperor, who pardoned him.⁵⁰ In her biography in the official history, she is accorded high praise for her political activities, primarily because of her cooperation with Grand Secretary Zhang Juzheng during the emperor's minority. He asked her to oversee governmental affairs, the historians write, and during this period she made significant contributions to state affairs, including the evaluation of the performance of the officials [literally, *investigating the name and the reality*], so that the wealth and power of the state were enhanced.⁵¹ It is possible that the historians are here

suggesting a comparison between the empress dowager's careful attention to affairs of state and her son's subsequent neglect of them.

The dowager's biography in the official history outlines her career. Her family was a military family originally from Huo Xian near Tongzhou at the northern terminus of the Grand Canal, southeast of Beijing. While her husband was still Prince of Yu, she became a secondary consort. When he ascended the throne in 1567, she became Honored Consort, but she never became empress. Her husband died in 1572, when she was twenty-six and the mother of three young children. When her nine-year-old eldest son became emperor, in 1573, she became empress dowager. Grand Secretary Zhang Juzheng invited her to move into the emperor's residence, and there she supervised his daily life and early education. If the boy emperor did not study as he should, she made him kneel, a startling punishment for an emperor, even a nine-year-old one. Attendants who followed her commands were also exceedingly strict with the boy. The empress dowager supervised the "Classics Mat" colloquia, which took place in the Hall of Literary Brilliance immediately after the morning court audience. There, senior officials including Grand Secretaries and Hanlin Academicians, elite scholars who drafted official documents and advised the emperor, gave lectures on the meaning of the classics to the emperor and the most senior civil and military officials.⁵² At these august gatherings, the empress dowager ordered her young son to imitate the lecturing officials and to go up and speak at the front of the hall.

When the court was in session, the empress dowager would enter the emperor's sleeping apartments before dawn and call out, "The emperor will rise!" She ordered the attendants to support him into a seated position, bring water to wash his face and assist him to get into the imperial carriage and go to court. When the emperor married at the age of fifteen, the Empress Dowager withdrew from his residence to signify that he was now of age and able to exercise his responsibilities in his own right. Despite his adult status, she more than once still found the need to rebuke him fiercely and publicly. One evening he was drinking wine at a banquet and some of his attendants could not sing the songs he wanted them to sing. When he took up a sword to strike them, all those in his party begged him to restrain himself. He then humiliated the attendants by cutting some hair from their heads, a mock punishment. When she heard of this the next day, the empress dowager was very angry. She instructed Grand Secretary Zhang Juzheng to write a memorial remonstrating with the emperor and to draft a decree in which the emperor would admit the wrong he had done. She ordered the emperor to kneel to receive these criticisms and only when he wept and asked for guidance in correcting his behavior was he pardoned.

A further instance of the empress dowager's authority over her son occurred many years later, when he had adolescent children of his own. Once, when he came to call on her, the dowager asked him why he had not yet established his eldest son as heir apparent. He replied that his eldest son was only the son of a lowly palace woman. Recalling her own once humble status, the furious empress dowager replied, "You are the son of a lowly palace woman!" The terrified emperor prostrated himself before his mother and did not dare to rise.⁵³



Fig. 2. Empress Dowager Li's court overvest, dated 1595, back view

A Perspective from Material Culture

A magnificent embroidered double-woven silk-brocade sleeveless robe decorated with symbols of long life and good fortune in the collection of the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco provides material evidence of ideas and images that were meaningful to Empress Dowager Li at the height of her powers. The quality of the workmanship of the robe is exceptional and it is likely to have been made as one small part of the celebrations on the occasion of her fifty *sui* birthday on December 7th, 1595.⁵⁴ Craig Clunas⁵⁵ has highlighted the pervasiveness of objects and images in elite society and at court that reminded women of the centrality of their role as the mothers of male children who would carry on the patriline. This robe gives a powerful indication of how the intense subordination, humility, and self-abnegation required of a woman in the early stages of her entry into the

imperial family were transformed into a vision of almost supernatural authority when she succeeded, against nearly impossible odds, in bearing and bringing up a son who lived to become emperor. The robe indicates the sumptuousness of the material surroundings of a successful late-Ming empress dowager, the breadth and depth of her material and ritual prerogatives and the status she enjoyed as the most senior member of the imperial family, before whom even the emperor had to kneel.

The front of the robe (fig. 1) has a symmetrical design. A Buddhist swastika, a homophone with the same sound and meaning as *wan* (10,000) adorns each shoulder immediately above the large golden character *shou*, long life. Together they form a rebus for *wan shou*, “ten thousand longevities,” a greeting that could be used only for the emperor, the empress, or the empress dowager.⁵⁶ Beneath the golden characters, two white-horned, white-whiskered, five-clawed Wanli imperial dragons appear in profile, each holding a luminous white pearl in his mouth and each clutching a magnificent-bordered red cloud in his claws.

The back of the empress dowager’s robe (fig. 2) repeats the rebus begun on the front. Here, there are two Buddhist swastikas and just one “long life” character. If one “reads” first the front of the robe and then the back, it says, *wan shou, wan shou, wan wan shou*, “ten thousand, ten thousand longevities!” a cry that undoubtedly echoed through her palace when the empress dowager received the congratulations of the titled ladies of the inner and outer courts on her birthday. The back of the robe continues the theme of longevity, with two small peaches, Buddhist symbols of immortality, embroidered below the collar. Two further Wanli-period dragons, each with his pearl above him adorn the symmetrical panels of the back of the robe. Their rainbow-colored manes stream behind them and they clutch blue or green clouds in their claws. The decorations on the robe are rich in symbolism and word play. A surprisingly furry and realistic bat, *fu*, a homophone of *fu* (good fortune) descends over a conch shell, another Buddhist symbol. The clouds (*yun*) that are the most frequent decorative theme on both faces of the robe are also homophones for good fortune (*yun*). Repeating the design on the front of the robe, four *lingzhi* fungus, each with six small leaves, float above the waves at the hem of the robe. Sixteen smaller golden dragons play among the rocks, waves and coral branches along the borders of the back of the robe, while twenty small dragons adorn the front.⁵⁷ The images on the robe convey a message of super-abundant blessings for the dowager and the imperial family, blessings that were secular and sacred, Buddhist and Confucian, popular and imperial, unlimited by gender.

Empress Dowager Li lived for nearly twenty more years after the celebrations for which the birthday robe was made, and her ability to command the resources of the imperial household and to influence the course of events only increased with time. Like many Chinese imperial women before her, she was an active patron of Buddhism, a religion which opened to women a different range of positive, gendered roles than did Confucianism. From 1573 until the end of her life, Empress Dowager Li had a profound impact on the life of Beijing and its suburbs through her generous patronage of Buddhist temples and clergy. She was responsible for establishing thirteen temples, restoring twelve more, and making substantial donations to a further six.⁵⁸ In this, she was assisted by

the eunuch Feng Bao, who was her ally early in her career, by other eunuchs, and by many of the court ladies, who all subscribed substantial sums to support the temples and their religious leaders. The renowned artist Dong Qichang (1555–1636) contributed an inscription for one of the steles. Furthermore, despite the record in the empress dowager's official biography of Grand Secretary Zhang Juzheng's opposition to her patronage of the temples, he composed at least five inscriptions for steles in temples sponsored by her.

Empress Dowager Li also continued to play an active role in the politics of the inner court. As noted above, in 1601, she cooperated with civil officials to end a fifteen-year stalemate and force the resisting emperor to name his eldest son as heir. Just before she died in 1614, the empress dowager used her position as the most senior member of the imperial family once more to cement the settlement of the vexed question of the succession. She defended the still tenuous position of the heir apparent against continuing pressure from her son's favorite consort, Lady Zheng, who still hoped to improve her own position and that of her son. When Lady Zheng suggested that her twenty-six-year-old son, the Prince of Fu, should remain resident in Beijing for the dowager's seventy *sui* birthday celebrations, the dowager responded by saying that in that case, she would summon her own second son, the Prince of Lu, back to Beijing to take part as well.⁵⁹ This veiled threat from the empress dowager protected the position of the heir apparent and forced the emperor at last to send the adult son of his favorite consort away from the court to take up residence at his princely estate.

Empress Dowager Li, Ritual, and the Court

The court of the Wanli Emperor was beset with challenges, including unprecedented economic and social change that was rapidly moving the economy beyond its agrarian base and beyond the ability of existing systems to govern it. Challenges on the borders of the empire came from the Mongols and the Manchus as well as from Korea, Japan, the Philippines, and the Miao people in Guizhou and Yunnan. Europeans, including the Spanish, the Portuguese, and Italian Jesuit priests such as Matteo Ricci were beginning to arrive in Chinese ports and in the capital.⁶⁰ As he grew older, the Wanli Emperor became profoundly alienated from his officials. His unwillingness to play the role they had designed for him and his inability to invent an effective new role allowed his court to drift into bitter and destructive factional infighting. The emperor and the imperial family asserted their continued political dominance by spending truly prodigious sums of money on court rituals, including weddings, investitures, and funerals. These magnificent events drained the resources of the state and sometimes cost more in a year than the imperial treasury contained.⁶¹

Empress Dowager Li was a close contemporary of Queen Elizabeth I of England (1533–1603), and the rituals of the Ming court, like those of the Elizabethan court, touched the people at many points. Ming clothing, marriage ceremonies, burial rites, and the sacrifices to the ancestors were all prescribed by the central government. The higher people rose in the social scale, the more likely they were to adopt these prescriptions and to attempt to move into the next band in the sumptuary ladder. This drew them more tightly into the network that linked the people to the court. Although the public were excluded from most

imperial rituals, many thousands of people were directly or indirectly involved in the preparations for the great state occasions which were attended by all the ranking metropolitan officials and their wives. Some rituals, including the imperial funeral processions, were orchestrated as public spectacles in which the whole population of the capital could share.

The elaborateness of funerals and tombs marked the social position which a member of the imperial family had reached during their lifetime. Imperial funeral processions provided the court and the people with an opportunity to witness the grandest and most extravagant of all imperial rituals. A seventeenth-century account by a Portuguese Jesuit priest corroborates the account of funeral ceremonies contained in the official writings on ritual, but adds a great deal of additional detail. Alvaro Semedo (1585–1658) was in Beijing in March of 1614 when Empress Dowager Li died, and he has left a colorful account of her burial which was translated into English and published in London in 1655.⁶² On the third day after Empress Dowager Li's death, Semedo writes, her body was placed in its coffin. The emperor himself helped to lower the body onto its quilt and pillow and then strewed upon her pearls and precious stones to the value of "70,000 crowns" and placed by her side "fifty pieces of cloth of gold and fifty of cloth of silver, which would truly have been enough to have maintained a gallant man all his lifetime."⁶³ Mourning continued for more than four months. Hanlin Academicians wrote elegies, Buddhist monks carried out ceremonies, and civil officials and commoners were required to wear mourning dress. More than 50,000 soldiers guarded the processional route to the tomb and the tomb site itself. A "multitude" of people lined the route to the tombs, hoping to see the procession. A general amnesty and tax relief were declared and pieces of silver wrapped in paper by the emperor himself were given to the poor as alms.⁶⁴

During her lifetime, the emperor had richly endowed his mother with honorific titles. In 1579, the year of his marriage, and again in 1585, 1602, and 1607, he added more words of praise to her title. At her death she received a magnificent title consisting of fifteen characters, "Filial, stately, chaste, pure, imperial, humane, principled, majestic, assistant to heaven, blessed, sage, imperial empress dowager." Though she was buried with her husband in his tomb, her son was unable to secure for her a place in the two most prestigious halls for ancestral sacrifices and she was "separately honored" in the ancillary Hall for the Veneration of the Ancestors.⁶⁵

For those who lived at the Ming court, scarcely a day passed without some ritual event or seasonal observance. Ritual marked out the rhythms of the seasons and the years. It affirmed the legitimacy of the reigning emperor and his wife. The emperor used it to reward and control his officials. The ritual observances of the court affirmed the high status of the officials and their wives and their ranking in relation to each other. They highlighted the place of each participant in stylized representations of the order that governed the empire and the deference owed by all subjects to the imperial family. In their turn, the officials used rituals to control the emperor. When the full ritual calendar was observed, it occupied a substantial proportion of his time and energy and encouraged him to conform to a view of his role which was sanctioned by them. At the beginning of the dynasty, and at many points during its course, powerful

emperors were often able to drive the ritual agenda. By the end of the dynasty, the balance had shifted to favor the officials.

For the thousands of palace women whose status was low, the ritual calendar, with its repeated pattern of colorful events, provided distraction, diversion, and a sense of order, meaning, and purpose. For women in the imperial family, life was a constant struggle to secure ever higher ritual honors. The sons of imperial women often continued the battle to honor their mothers long after the women had died. Ritual provided a positive channel for the energies of imperial women. While their conflicts with one another were often intense, the violence and bloodshed that had often characterized the relations among imperial women in earlier dynasties were sometimes mitigated or avoided.

Conclusion

The Ming imperial household presented women with formidable challenges and limited opportunities. Their roles were rigidly prescribed, and yet flexibility could often be found. Their participation in the politics of the court was forbidden, and yet the most successful women negotiated their way to positions of influence over emperors, civil officials, and eunuchs as well as dominance over the other women of the household. Subordinate roles as wives and consorts could be transformed into powerful roles, sanctioned by the Confucian elite, as mothers, teachers, and advisers. For women who were not mothers, literacy and religion, especially Buddhism, opened up fresh pathways for activity, agency, and advancement.

The layered structure of the Ming court surrounded and protected the members of the imperial household at the same time that it constrained the scope of their activities. In the mid- and late-Ming imperial household, weak versions of monogamy and primogeniture governed the lives of senior imperial women and determined the succession. Thousands of women staffed the palace. Apart from those who had served his father, the emperor could select any of them as a sexual partner. If a young woman were very clever and very lucky, and especially if she had the protection of a more senior woman, she might become the mother of the heir. The resulting social mobility for the women and their families was consistently more dramatic than in earlier eras. The system gave a reproductive advantage to the emperors, to the mothers of the imperial princes and princesses and to the heads of elite households that imitated the imperial system of serial monogamy with concubinage.

The roles of hundreds of the women who worked in the palace required them to be literate. The education they received set them on the pathway to elite literacy and qualified them to participate in daily financial transactions within the household and in the literary, ritual, and historical writing that were fundamental to claims of legitimacy and the exercise of power. The rituals that pervaded all aspects of life in the imperial household sometimes provided a measure of safety and protection for imperial women and highlighted for all the advantages of conforming to the vision of order that they embodied. The Ming court and the imperial household within it constituted a delicately calibrated social mechanism for balancing the interests of the emperor and members of the

imperial family and their relatives with those of the eunuchs, palace women, and civil officials who served them. The civil officials dominated the discourse on the politics of the imperial household and they shared with the emperors and the imperial family a large measure of responsibility both for the robustness and longevity of the system and for many of the faults that led to its demise. It is noteworthy that the first Qing emperors moved immediately to exclude the civil officials from decisions about the succession, abandoned primogeniture as the principle for selecting the heir apparent and ensured that the imperial princes received an education outside the palace. All these changes impacted significantly the roles and opportunities of imperial women.

Some of the words and acts of the most prominent Ming imperial women are accessible through the filtering lens of the biographies written by the official historians. A greatly enriched view of their trajectories emerges when we consider the material objects they lived with, the unofficial histories including the writings of the eunuch, Liu Ruoyu, and the dated records on stone stele outside the walls of the imperial palace. Despite formidable structural constraints on their activities and the constant threat of inner court rivalry, persecution, and untimely death, women of the late-Ming imperial household contributed to the success of the imperial family in a rapidly changing world and shaped both the family and the system to their own ends. Women such as Empress Dowager Li, who were both very fortunate and very able, left a lasting imprint on the politics and the culture of the capital and the court.

Glossary

Auspicious rites	<i>jili</i>	吉禮
Bat	<i>fu</i>	蝠
Bearers of the Seals	<i>zhangyin</i>	掌印
<i>Book of Ceremonial</i>	<i>Yili</i>	儀禮
<i>Book of Rites</i>	<i>Liji</i>	禮記
Cloud	<i>yun</i>	雲
Directorate of Seals and Tallies	Shangbaojian	尚寶監
Empress	<i>huanghou</i>	皇后
Empress dowager	<i>huangtaihou</i>	皇太后
Empress Dowager Li, the Compassionate and Sage Empress Dowager	Cisheng Huangtaihou	慈聖皇太后
Festive rites	<i>jiali</i>	嘉裡
General Palace Service	Shanggong Si	尚宮司
Good families	<i>liangjia</i>	良家
Good fortune	<i>fu</i>	福
Good fortune	<i>yun</i>	運
Grand empress dowager	<i>Taihuangtaihou</i>	太皇太后
Hall for Ancestral Worship	Fengxian Dian	奉先殿
Hall for Ancestral Compassionate Mothers	Fengci Dian	奉慈殿
Hall of Expansive Filial Piety	Hongxiao Dian	弘孝殿
Hall of Literary Brilliance	Wenhua Dian	文華殿
Hall of the Spiritual Empyrean	Shenxiao Dian	神霄殿
Hall for the Veneration of the Ancestors	Chongxian Dian	崇先殿
Honored because of his daughter	<i>yinügui</i>	以女貴
Honored consort	<i>guifei</i>	貴妃
Hundred surnames	<i>baijiaxing</i>	百家姓
Huo County	Huo Xian	灑縣
Imperial Ancestral Temple	Tai Miao	太廟
Inauspicious rites	<i>xiongli</i>	凶禮
Inner Office of Seals	Neishangbao	內尚寶
Investigating the name and the reality	<i>zonghemingshi</i>	綜核名實
Laundry Service	Huanyiju	浣衣局
Lingzhi fungus	<i>lingzhi</i>	靈芝
Long-life flowers	<i>shouhua</i>	壽花
Lowly palace woman	<i>duren</i>	都人
Madame Ke	Keshi	客氏
Office of Palace Staff Surveillance	Gongzheng Si	宮正司
Office of Rites and Propriety	Liyifang	禮儀房

Office of Seals and Tallies	Shangbao Si	尚寶司
<i>Official Ming History</i>	<i>Mingshi</i>	明史
Palace of Earthly Tranquility	Kunning Gong	坤寧宮
<i>Rites of Zhou</i>	<i>Zhouli</i>	周禮
Ten thousand times long life	<i>wan shou</i>	萬壽
<i>Thousand Character Classic</i>	<i>Qianziwen</i>	千字文
Titled ladies of the outer court	<i>waimingfu</i>	外命婦
Women graduates	<i>nü xiucai</i>	女秀才

Notes

- ¹ Ellen Soulliere 1987.
- ² Jennifer Holmgren 1991, p. 61.
- ³ Carney Fisher 1990.
- ⁴ Bonnie Anderson and Judith Zinsser 1998, vol. 1.
- ⁵ Melvin Thatcher 1991; Holmgren, 1991.
- ⁶ Soulliere 1987, pp. 242–46; 1992, p. 125; 2005.
- ⁷ Laura Betzig 1986; 1997.
- ⁸ Soulliere 2005.
- ⁹ Beverly Bossler 2003.
- ¹⁰ Soulliere 1987; 1988; Hsieh Bao Hua 2000.
- ¹¹ Yang Lien-sheng 1968.
- ¹² Soulliere 1987.
- ¹³ Charles Hucker 1958, p. 10; Hucker 1998, p. 20.
- ¹⁴ Alvaro Semedo 1655, pp. 113–14, cited in Soulliere 1987.
- ¹⁵ Soulliere 1988.
- ¹⁶ Lee Hui-shu 2010.
- ¹⁷ Evelyn Rawski 1998, p. 296.
- ¹⁸ Holmgren, p. 65.
- ¹⁹ Ming Taizu 1381.
- ²⁰ Shen Shixing 1587, vol. 2, ch. 67, p. 1107.
- ²¹ Yu Ruji et al. 1620, ch. 61, p. 15.
- ²² Shen Shixing, pp. 1455 ff.
- ²³ Zhang Tingyu 1736, vol. 6, ch. 74, pp. 1827–29.
- ²⁴ Priscilla Ching Chung 1981.
- ²⁵ Lee, p. 82 and elsewhere.
- ²⁶ Ray Huang 1961; Frederick Mote 1977, pp. 211–14.
- ²⁷ Zhang, vol. 6, p. 1829.
- ²⁸ Liu Ruoyu ca. 1641, ch. 16, p. 56.
- ²⁹ Herbert Franke 1976.
- ³⁰ Liu, ch. 16, p. 56, cited in Soulliere 1987.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, ch. 16, pp. 56a and b, cited in Soulliere 1987; Hsieh 2000; and Scarlett Jang 2008.
- ³² Liu ca. 1641, ch. 16, p. 38.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, ch. 16, p. 8B; Shen Shixing, p. 74; and Zha Jizuo 1670, ch. 27, p. 55a.
- ³⁴ Shen Shixing, pp. 74–76.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 75; Soulliere 1987; 2005; and Hsieh.
- ³⁶ Sarah Hrdy 1997, pp. 410–11.
- ³⁷ Soulliere 2005, pp. 42–45.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 46.
- ³⁹ Zhang, vol. 12, ch. 114, pp. 3542–43.
- ⁴⁰ Huang 1997, p. 109.
- ⁴¹ Shen Shixing, vol. 3, ch. 86, p. 1860.
- ⁴² Mote 1977, p. 214, citing Zhang, ch. 52.
- ⁴³ Zhang, vol. 5, ch. 52, p. 1333.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 12, ch. 114, p. 3539.

- ⁴⁵ Ibid., vol. 12, ch. 114, p. 3544.
⁴⁶ Ibid., vol. 5, ch. 53, p. 1362.
⁴⁷ Ibid.; Mote 1977, p. 220.
⁴⁸ Zhang, vol. 12, ch. 114, p. 3542.
⁴⁹ Ibid.
⁵⁰ Ibid., vol. 12, ch. 114, p. 3536.
⁵¹ Ibid., vol. 12, ch. 114, p. 3535.
⁵² Chu Hung-lam 2008, p. 188.
⁵³ Zhang, vol. 12, ch. 114, p. 3535; Chou Tao-chi 1976, pp. 857–58.
⁵⁴ Michael Knight and Li He 2008, fig. 33, p. 73.
⁵⁵ Craig Clunas 1991, p. 56.
⁵⁶ Knight and Li 2008, p. 73.
⁵⁷ Ibid.
⁵⁸ Susan Naquin 2000, p. 156.
⁵⁹ Zhang 1736, vol. 12, ch. 114, p. 3536; Chou 1976, vol. 1, p. 858.
⁶⁰ Huang 1988.
⁶¹ Hucker 1976, p. 334.
⁶² See Huang 1981, p. 94 for another account of the funeral rites.
⁶³ Semedo, p. 78.
⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 83.
⁶⁵ Zhang, vol. 12, ch. 114, p. 3535.

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