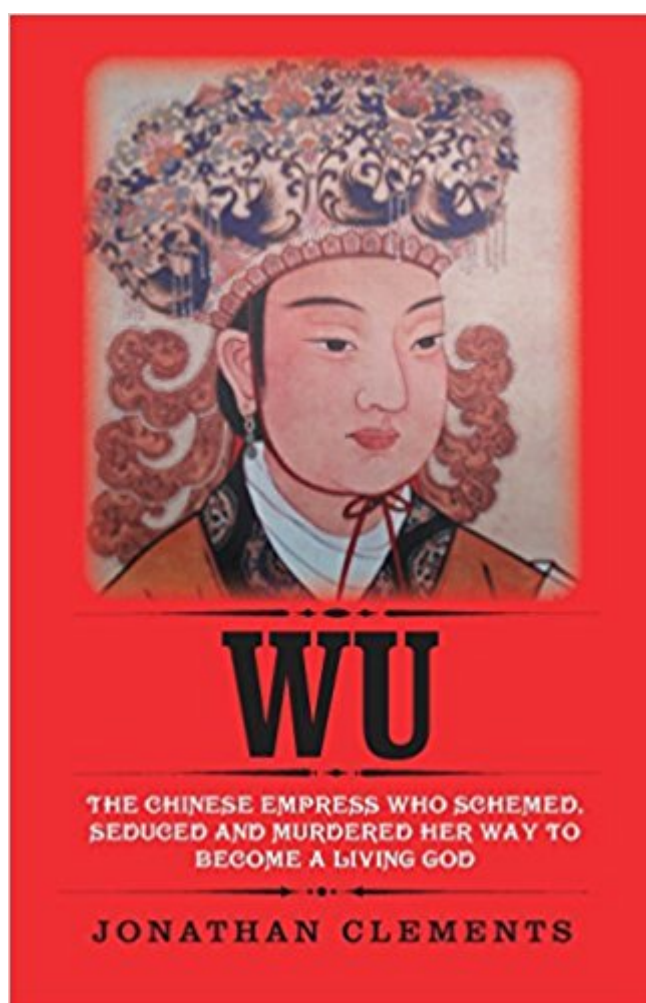


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# Wu: The Chinese Empress Who Schemed, Seduced And Murdered Her Way To Become A Living God



## Synopsis

Empress Wu Zetian (624-705 AD) was the only woman to be the sovereign ruler of imperial China. A teenage concubine of the Tang Emperor Taizong, she seduced his son while the emperor lay dying. Recalled from a nunnery as part of an intricate court power-game, she caused the deaths of two lady rivals, before securing her enthronement as the Emperor Gaozong's consort. She ruled in the name of her husband and two eldest sons, presiding over the pinnacle of the Silk Road, before proclaiming herself the founder of a new dynasty. Worshipped as the Sage Mother of Mankind and reviled as the Treacherous Fox, she was deposed aged 79, after angry courtiers murdered her two young lovers. The subject of countless books, plays and films, Empress Wu remains a feminist icon and a bugbear of Chinese conservatism. Jonathan Clements weighs the evidence of her life and legacy: so charismatic that she could rise from nothing to the height of medieval power, so hated that her own children left her tombstone blank.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Empress Wu (625-705), the only woman in Chinese history to rule in her own name during the golden age of the Tang Dynasty, began her career as a low-ranking concubine in the palace of Emperor Taizong. Here, historian and author Clements (*The First Emperor*) tells the story of her improbable rise to power and her 30-plus years as Empress. Aside from his subtitle, Clements is even-handed in his depiction. Wu was a feminist who argued for the equality of women, upset the long established Confucian orthodoxy by appointing new bureaucrats according to their merit, and courted the commoners by lowering taxes and developing new farmlands. She also started her own

secret police force, had eleven branches of the imperial family exterminated-entirely-during two years of purges, and made her cosmetics-dealing lover a Buddhist priest so that he could proclaim her divinity. Clements' only misstep is in his parade of minor historical characters, introduced every few pages to distracting effect. Otherwise, Clements' skillful narrative leaves it to the reader to decide whether Wu was a tyrant or a dutiful stateswoman maligned by the patriarchs of history; students of Chinese history will find this illuminating and enjoyable. Illustrations. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Jonathan Clements is currently a Visiting Professor at Xi'an Jiaotong University, China. His books include histories of Beijing and the Silk Road, and biographies of Chairman Mao, Marco Polo and the diplomat Wellington Koo. The Chinese translation of his book on the First Emperor was published in in 2007. He was a consultant and interviewee on the National Geographic documentary *Koxinga: A Hero's Legacy*, which drew heavily on his book *Pirate King*, and has appeared on many other programmes on Chinese and Japanese history for Channel Four, PBS and BBC Yesterday. His most recent works include *The Art of War: A New Translation*, which revisits Sun Tzu's military classic, and *Modern China: All That Matters*, a study of contemporary issues facing the People's Republic.

Great insight, great story.

Jonathan Clements has managed to take the story of the controversial Empress Wu and make it extremely entertaining, while still maintaining historical accuracy. He keeps the narrative going at a quick pace, but provides enough details to keep the reader from becoming lost or confused. Empress Wu is a really difficult historical figure. She is neither a good guy or a bad guy. She is a woman who did some amazing things, and some really terrible things. So many biographies of Wu have an agenda, either to make her look like a martyr or a villain, and the truth is far more complicated than that. Clements provides both what is known about Empress Wu, and various opinions and constructs of her made by those who came later. He shows how the image of Empress Wu is often twisted to meet the needs of political fads, and that all of these perspectives should be taken with a grain of salt. Even if you know nothing about Chinese history, you will find this book a fascinating and lively read.

loved this.

A very balanced and well written account of Empress Wu at that critical junction of the Tang Dynasty. I agree that she set the track for the future consolidation (and perhaps later the fall) of Tang.

I would have preferred learning more about China's standing in the world. Jonathan concentrates too much on killings, beheading and intrigue. In the end, he does stand up for women.

This is a poor writing history work which there is lots of wrong information. If this is an historic essay to kids, the stories are obvious myths not facts. If this is a story, it was poorly told and organized. The Translation style is a word-to-word method which causes misunderstanding and sent wrong information.

What a fantastic story, and true history even though documentation from 600 AD is full of prejudice and exaggerations. The only female empress in Chinese history - hopefully not to be repeated when America elects it's first female President. Wu was not a lady I would like to meet. Great story!

Jonathan Clements breathes life into this history; He gives facts in a way that make it seems more like a story than dry, ancient history. This work is worth a read whether you know Wu's story or not. An enjoyable read about a woman the world should never forget.

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