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Deborah A. Sommer, (司馬黛蘭), *Gettysburg College*



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Decentering Imperial Women: Confucian Fertility Rites in the Ming Dynasty

Deborah A. Sommer
Gettysburg College
Gettysburg, PA

Abstract: In the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), Chinese scholars reformulated an ancient ritual for begetting male children known as the Exalted Progenitor (*gao mei*) rite. Scholars clearly believed divine forces played a great role in ensuring the birth of children, but the role they attributed to women in that process is not so evident. This article considers the ancient ritual precedents the Ming scholars cited and also explores how the rites they created differed from earlier practices. One of the most obvious differences was the greatly diminished role of women. In early texts, women were the primary participants in the rite, but by at least Ming times, they were believed to profane the ritual altars with their presence.

In China, the subject of praying for children would at first glance seem to fall within the purview of Buddhist or folk traditions rather than the classical tradition often known as Confucianism. The Confucian tradition, which I will here refer to more generally as the "literati tradition," is sometimes perceived as a scholarly endeavor little concerned with religious phenomena, much less fertility rites. Buddhism, for example, could offer childless devotees the divinity Guanyin, a Chinese version of the Indian divinity Avalokiteshvara, whose name in Chinese meant "Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds." According to the *Lotus Sutra* (ca. first century CE), Guanyin hears the cries of petitioners in the world below who ask for children.

If a woman wishes to give birth to a male child, she should offer obeisance and alms to Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds and then she will bear a

son blessed with merit, virtue, and wisdom. And if she wishes to bear a daughter, she will bear one with all the marks of comeliness, one who in the past planted the roots of virtue and is loved and respected by many persons.¹

Guanyin could grant either male or female children to anyone, regardless of their wealth or social status. Seeking help from Guanyin was accomplished by devout followers directly, without intercession on the part of religious professionals. Guanyin was not the only divinity in China that might bestow children, for the folk tradition also boasted several goddesses the laity might beseech for descendants. The Goddess of Azure Clouds (*Bixia yuanjun*) enshrined on Mount Tai in the Shandong peninsula served this role in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), for example, and the Birth Mother (*Chusheng niangniang*) continues the same role in modern Taiwan.²

But literati thinkers, too, believed it possible that human beings might acquire children through spiritual means, and many believed that prayers for offspring would be answered. Most accepted this notion without question and concerned themselves with designing the details of the ceremonies necessary for achieving the desired results. Literati scholars frequently held official positions as supervisors of rituals in the official bureaucracy, and some were responsible for imperial rites intended to produce children for the emperor. Most believed, or professed to believe, that human reproduction was not merely a matter of biological functions but was a matter that fell within the purview of divine powers such as heaven. In 1027, for example, the Supervisor of Imperial Sacrifice Zhang Heng stated that "the sons and grandsons of emperors and kings are from a mandate by heaven."³ Likewise, the Ming dynasty scholar Qiu Jun (1421-1495) said that even though this matter of begetting children "would seem to be of human making, actually it is accomplished through heaven."⁴ Scholars such as Qiu Jun were moreover responsible for interpreting if not creating the rites requisite to producing male children for the ruler. This article explores how literati scholars, particularly in the Ming dynasty, formulated rituals for begetting children. These were known as rites to the Exalted Progenitor, and they were a kind of votive or sacrificial offering. Here I consider the ancient ritual precedents from early texts that they drew upon, and I also consider how the rites they created differed in significant ways from those earlier practices.

One of the most obvious differences between ancient and Ming dynasty fertility rites was the role women played in them: in early texts, women were the primary ritual participants, but by at least Ming times, their presence in the rites was much diminished, and they had even become perceived as a source of pollution. For whereas literati scholars clearly believed divine forces played a great role in ensuring the birth of children, the role they attributed to women in the same process is not so clear. The history of the Exalted Progenitor sacrifice is not the story of women and their children: it is the story of emperors and their sons.⁵ Encyclopedic compilations that document the history of the rite, such as Ma Duanlin's (1254-1324)

Conspectus of Documentary Records (*Wenxian tongkao*) rarely if ever recorded the names of historical female figures who were considered to have given birth as the result of that rite. While those documents recorded, for example, the dimensions of the sacrificial altars, the colors of the ceremonial attire, and the names of the male officials who composed the rhapsodies commissioned upon the happy occasion of the birth of an imperial heir, they fall silent regarding the names of the women who gave birth to the Sons of Heaven.⁶

To trace the history of this rite in the Ming period (1368-1644), I have turned to such historical compendia as Ma Duanlin's *Conspectus of Documentary Records*, an encyclopedic collection of institutional usages that relates, among other things, the various kinds of sacrificial offerings practiced at the imperial level.⁷ Ma's documentation of the Exalted Progenitor rite influenced Qiu Jun's discussion of the same observance in his *Supplement to the Extended Meaning of the Great Learning* (*Daxue yanyi bu*, 1487), which was a massive handbook for statecraft.⁸ Both Ma's and Qiu's histories of this ritual, however, are greatly superseded by the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) *Conspectus of the Five Rites* (*Wuli tongkao*; 1761), a work of 262 chapters compiled by the scholar Qin Huitian.⁹ In addition to consulting these texts, I have also considered numerous commentaries on relevant passages from the *Book of Rites* (*Liji*) and *Book of Odes* (*Shijing*). My choice of sources, conservatively limited in scope to historical documents and classical literati commentaries, clearly places the practice of praying for babies within the literati tradition.

By Ming times, the imperial system of rituals that sustained relationships between the human world and numinous forces was over fifteen hundred years old. Based in principle on texts compiled during the Spring and Autumn (781-479 BCE) and Warring States (403-222 BCE) times, it had accumulated thousands of tomes of commentarial tradition and had also accumulated an equal amount of historical documents that recorded previous dynasties' ritual practices. The ritual system was subject to constant revision and was continually reinterpreted to serve contemporary needs. Within this system, the rite performed for begetting children—the Exalted Progenitor (*gao mei*) rite—was usually a relatively minor observance dwarfed by the rites to heaven and earth, for example, or to the spirits of the land and grain. But when a ruler had no sons, the Exalted Progenitor ritual became an urgent concern. For the most part it was called upon only when necessary, that is, when a reigning emperor found himself without heirs. According to most dynastic histories, it was performed primarily at the imperial level, and its powers were inaccessible to few but the Son of Heaven and his consorts.

For a tradition that placed such a high priority on producing male descendants and that produced ritual observances pertaining to virtually every conceivable human concern, it seems odd that the literati tradition did not offer the average person any religious means of acquiring children. It offered a host of ritual services for other occasions: rain sacrifices in the event of droughts, for example, and exorcisms in the event of illness or natural disasters.

Considering this gap in the literati ritual portfolio, it is little wonder that Guanyin and the Goddess of the Azure Clouds drew such large clienteles. It was actually to counter the popularity of Buddhist and folk divinities that some Ming scholars sought to give greater attention to the Exalted Progenitor rite in the fifteenth century, for in their eyes some of the classical rites of antiquity had been supplanted by foreign customs imported from India or by vulgar customs popular among the common people.

In the fifteenth century, Qiu Jun attempted to resuscitate various ancient Confucian ceremonies that he believed had been supplanted by Buddhism, Daoism, and popular religion. He admonished the ruler to be suspicious of the machinations of magicians (*fangshi*), to turn away from the followers of Shakyamuni Buddha (*Shi shi*) and Laozi (*Lao shi*), and to turn again to the classical rites of antiquity. His agenda is set forth in his *Supplement to the Extended Meaning of the Great Learning* (*Daxue yanji bu*; 1487), where he decries the inroads that he thought popular religion had made upon the sacred formulations of the sage kings of Chinese antiquity. To discern the religious principles and practices for supplicating heaven for children, Qiu believed, one need not turn to the unholy prestigitations of popular religion. To find proper precedents for the rites and ceremonies for seeking offspring, he stated, one need look no further than the Exalted Progenitor sacrifice described in the ancient *Book of Rites* and pray to heaven for the desired results. "If one is childless and prays in supplication to heaven," he stated, "there does exist a principle whereby it will bestow its gaze" and grant the request.¹⁰ Qiu Jun's anthropomorphized description of heaven "bestowing its gaze" recalls the image of the Buddhist Guanyin, who watches the human world below and hears its cries. Qiu Jun, however, would no doubt deny the existence of any Buddhist influences on his understanding of heaven.

Qiu Jun was particularly concerned with the emperor's role as the realm's most important progenitor, for the nation's stability was endangered if the sovereign was without heirs. Perhaps Qiu's urgency was colored by the reigning emperor Xianzong's (r. 1464-1487) initial lack of male offspring, a crisis uncharitably attributed to the alleged interference of his consort Lady Wan (1430-1487), who purportedly saw to it that none of her rivals bore the emperor sons.¹¹ Qiu reminded the emperor of his responsibility to produce offspring and reminded him of how unfilial it was to produce no sons. Qiu Jun paints the issue in cosmically significant terms, noting that were the emperor lax in his reproductive responsibilities, he would be cutting off an ancestral lineage of qi, or vital energy, that had been transmitted from generation to generation since time primordial. Qiu writes,

[The ancient thinker Mencius has said that] "There are three things that are unfilial, and to have no progeny is the worst of these."¹² Now in an ancestral lineage, one vital energy is transmitted. Since human beings first appeared when heaven and earth opened up, right down to the present day, the continuity of birthing and begetting has not been a matter that concerns just

one individual. Would it not be devastating if one were to cut off this continuity when it reaches one? And how much more important a matter is this for [the emperor,] the one who is in charge of the solemnities at the great ancestral altars and at the altars of the land and grain, the one who is in charge of family lineages for thousands of generations, the one who is in charge of the great masses of people? How could he not be particularly concerned about this?¹³

The emperor's procreative history was a matter that concerned the whole realm. Moreover, it was not a purely biological affair completely within the control of human beings: it actually fell within heaven's purview. For if humans presented sacrificial offerings (*ji si*, a kind of ritual; the Exalted Progenitor rite was but one of the many kinds of sacrificial offerings) to heaven, it would respond with the desired result. Qiu Jun continues,

Even though this matter [of producing heirs] would seem to be of human making, it actually is accomplished through heaven. So in antiquity the sage kings formulated the Exalted Progenitor sacrifice for the suburban altars, and they formulated rites for praying for heirs. They accorded with the heavenly times and were in sympathy with things in kind. With pure thoughts, they proffered the Pure sacrifice. They sacrificed with the fullness of ritual so that they were heard from on high, and they hoped thereby to invoke auspicious results.¹⁴

But alas, Qiu mourns, these ancient literati rites have long been forgotten and have since been supplanted by what he considers to be the artifices of magicians.

In more recent times, people have not been aware that this is where these rites came from, and they place their faith instead in the delusions of magicians. People make their entreaties by setting out vegetarian repasts and by sending up magical charms. But outside of this darkness and obscurity they do not know of our sages' own rites, which are the ones that ought properly be performed.¹⁵

References to "vegetarian repasts" suggest a Buddhist presence; magical charms, a Daoist one. To remedy such nescient practices, Qiu Jun advocated reinstating the ancient Exalted Progenitor rite, which had rarely been performed during the preceding Yuan (1279-1368) dynasty. His vision of how the rite should be conducted, however, differed considerably from how ancient texts said it was performed in the past.

In early China, the Exalted Progenitor rite first appeared in the ancient classic the *Book of Rites*, which was compiled in the first or second centuries BCE but contains material from much earlier times. The rite as described in this text was eventually performed from Han times (206 BCE - 220 CE) to at least the early sixteenth century, with varying degrees of regularity (as was true of most ritual practices). All sources trace the *locus classicus* of the Exalted Progenitor (*gao mei*) rite to the "Monthly Ordinances" (*Yue ling*) chapter of the *Book of Rites*. The term *gao* in this expression is the common character meaning lofty, high, tall, or exalted. *Mei* is a very rare character composed on the right-hand side of the element "mou" (which when it occurs as a character in its own right is often a place-holder for an unnamed person and means "mou" or "so-and-so"); on the left is the radical for spiritual being (radical 113). The term *mei* refers both to the spirit or numinous power that helps beget children, and it refers also to the ceremony of the ritual performed to that spirit. The qualities of the *mei* spirit are not at all defined in early texts, and it had no apparent gender. My own translation of *gaomei* as "Exalted Progenitor" is less than felicitous, but as the *mei* spirit was invoked to produce progeny, and as no other English term presents itself, I have adopted that translation here.

In the Exalted Progenitor ritual recorded in the "Monthly Ordinances" chapter of the *Book of Rites*, the ruler and his consorts personally performed a Greater Lao sacrifice (a sacrifice of one ox, one hog, and one goat or sheep) to the Exalted Progenitor in the spring, when the "dark birds" (usually understood as some kind of migratory bird) arrive:

In the second month of spring, the dark birds arrive. . . . On the day they arrive, they worship the Exalted Progenitor with the Greater Lao. The Son of Heaven goes in person, and the queen and imperial consorts lead the nine [i.e., all] imperial concubines. They then treat with ceremony those women the Son of Heaven has favored. They [the women] bear bow holders, and they receive bows and arrows before the Exalted Progenitor.¹⁶

All later performances of the ceremony were to be based upon this passage, which describes when the sacrificial offering is held, who participates in it, and how it is performed. In the presence of the ruler, all the imperial women participate *in person* by receiving bows and arrows in the designated ritual space. That wives participated alongside their husbands was the norm in the many ceremonies described in the *Book of Rites*. What is unusual here, though, is that the women wear men's gear: they put on the paraphernalia of archery, objects that are elsewhere specifically associated with males. The *Book of Rites* elsewhere bluntly states that "archery is a man's affair,"¹⁷ and the shooting of arrows announced the birth of a male child. Upon the birth of a child, "if the child were a boy, a bow was placed on the left of the door; and if a girl, a handkerchief on the right. After three days the child began to be carried, and some archery was practised for a boy, but not for a girl."¹⁸ Upon the birth of a male heir in the royal family, the "master of the archers then took a bow of mulberry wood, and six arrows made of

the wild rubus, and shot towards heaven, earth, and the four cardinal points."¹⁹ This was because "Heaven, earth, and the four points denote the spheres wherein the business of a man lies."²⁰ Implements of archery, therefore, not only denote the presence of a male but also the entire realm of male behavior.

In early poetry, references to an archer's gear were allusions to the absent bodies of the men who owned them. Verses from the ancient *Book of Odes* (600 BCE?) tell us that when women thought longingly of their men who were away from home, they visualized them with their weapons. The following selection from the ode "The Little War Chariot" relates the thoughts that pass through a restive woman's mind as she lays waiting for her husband's return from a military expedition. She first thinks of his chariot, his horses, his body "like jade," his spears and shield, and finally of

The tiger-pelt bow case, with its carved metal bosses.
Intertwined (*jiao*) in the case are two bows
Bound tight to their bamboo frames.
I think of my husband
When I lie down and when I arise.²¹

The term *jiao* means "to communicate," "to intersect," "to have intercourse," and it can refer to the coupling of anything from human beings to cosmic forces. Here it is the bows that are intertwined, and they no doubt represent the closeness desired by the couple separated by distance.

The lonely wife in this verse might have thought fondly of her husband's belongings, but according to the *Book of Rites*, women normally did not have physical contact with their husband's possessions. So the fact that the women held bows and arrows during the Exalted Progenitor ceremony is all the more unusual considering the strict gender boundaries that separated the living quarters and personal belongings even of husbands and wives who had been married for decades. In the ideal household described by the *Book of Rites*, men lived in the exterior sections of the house; women, the interior. They shared few personal objects in common.

The men did not enter the interior; the women did not come out into the exterior. Males and females did not use the same stand or rack for their clothes. The wife did not presume to hang up anything on the pegs or stand of her husband; nor to put anything in his boxes or satchels; nor to share his bathing house.²²

Only when a couple reached the age of seventy did they even store their possessions in the same containers.²³

Since the arenas in which men and women operate were so carefully circumscribed, the "cross-dressing," if you will, seen in the ancient form of the Exalted Progenitor rite is an intriguing one, for here the women bear objects that symbolize the quintessence of maleness, objects that presumably would be otherwise taboo for them. Women were permitted to adopt temporarily the emblems of masculine identity in a ritual space that dissolved the boundaries between male and female that usually applied within the home. Women metaphorically coupled with their husband's maleness, here symbolically represented by the implements of archery. Were women permitted to transgress gender boundaries because they had become empowered to do so by virtue of their sexual contact with the ruler, which rendered them temporarily immune to conventional norms? As male and female overlapped in ritual space, cosmic energies of light and dark (eventually understood as yang and yin, which became associated with male and female, respectively) overlapped in ritual time. The Exalted Progenitor rite was held in the second month of spring, when the vernal equinox occurred. "In this month," the *Book of Rites* notes, "day and night are equal."²⁴ In the simulacrum of male and female exchange created in this ritual space (and here a simulacrum can be understood in both its modern dictionary senses as a likeness and as the travesty of a likeness), were the female participants availing themselves also of the temporal shift in cosmic forces to help them produce male fetuses? In early China, fetuses were not necessarily understood as being either male or female from the moment of conception; through various kinds of pre-natal care, they could be altered before birth. How those beliefs might be important in the Exalted Progenitor rite, however, is not clear. It was not a concern for later commentators, who are relatively silent concerning such things as the women's male attire. They acknowledged that the bow holders, bows, and arrows were auspicious symbols of maleness, but the image of women dressed as men did not interest them.

The Exalted Progenitor rite was performed by many succeeding dynasties, particularly when the reigning emperor reached adulthood but had no male heirs. But by the Ming dynasty, its popularity was being eclipsed by Buddhist, Daoist, and folk rituals for praying for children—at least if one is to believe the laments of fifteen-century literati scholars such as Qiu Jun, who saw threats from those traditions in many areas of ritual praxis.

Qiu believed that the presence of women polluted the sacred precincts where the rite was held: the southern suburban altars (that is, the altars outside the city walls) of Beijing, altars where in Ming times the emperor also conducted the great sacrifices to heaven. Qiu suggested that the Progenitor rite be downgraded, so to speak, and moved from the suburban altars into the inner palace grounds. For the emperor's women profaned the suburban altars with their presence. With this proposed new arrangement, the ladies would furthermore not be

incommoded by the journey to the altars, which was a distance of several kilometers south from the inner palace. Qiu asked the emperor to do the following:

Considering that the suburban altar is the usual place for sacrificing to heaven, to have the empress and imperial consorts and ladies of the court walk around in it is somewhat sacrilegious. Moreover, the suburban altar is outside of the national capital, and to have the empress, imperial consorts, and ladies of the court travel back and forth would inconvenience them. With a view to conducting the rites properly, I ask that you chose a pristine piece of ground within the palace for setting up an Exalted Progenitor altar. Set up the imperial tablets on it and make the Exalted Progenitor an adjunct recipient of the sacrifices.²⁵

He does not explain why he believes the women's presence profanes the suburban altars. No women, not even the empress herself, were deemed worthy to set foot on the altar. Even the Exalted Progenitor spirit has lost its position, for Qiu would make it a secondary adjunct to the imperial spirit tablets (vertical plinths that bore the name of the person or divinity represented) that represented the ruler's patriline. Whether Qiu Jun's suggestions were carried out in his lifetime, however, is uncertain.

A form of the Exalted Progenitor rite was briefly reinstated around 1530 during the rule of the then-childless emperor, Shizong (1507-1567; r. 1521-1567), and women were allowed on the altars to heaven again.²⁶ Shizong's first son was not born until 1533, twelve years into his reign. The first son died while still an infant, and only two others were to live to adulthood. And Shizong was not noted for his winning way with women: eighteen palace girls unsuccessfully tried to strangle him in 1542 and were executed for their efforts.²⁷ Many officials strongly opposed the presence of women at the most important altars in the land, but as the ruler as yet had no heirs, the situation was a desperate one. So women again participated in the rite: offerings were first made to heaven, and then women's officials led the empress and the imperial consorts before the altar of the Exalted Progenitor, where bow holders, bows, and arrows had been set out for each woman. The officials picked up the bows and arrows and handed them to the imperial women, who then inserted them into the holder.²⁸

But even though Shizong, as ruler, had his way during his lifetime and permitted women on the altars to heaven, Chinese historians eventually decided who would have the last word on the propriety of women's participation in the rite. Years after Shizong's death, Qin Huitian's massive *Conspectus of the Five Rites* concluded its discussion of the Exalted Progenitor rite with the views not of an emperor but of a commoner: the scholar Qiu Jun, who believed women belonged in the inner palace, not outside on the sacred altars to heaven. The altars were perhaps the most visible positions of power in the capital. Qin Huitian not so subtly

suggested that, historically speaking, part of the problem in conducting the Exalted Progenitor rite was that its performance had always depended on women. Qin concluded his discussion of the Exalted Progenitor rite as follows.

In antiquity, ritual affairs were conducted by inner and outer officials. In later ages, women were not suitably prepared for canonical rites, and because the Exalted Progenitor rite was of necessity conducted by the empress and consorts, it often was conducted only with difficulty. These are the differences between the rite in antiquity and in later times. Master Qiu's opinions should be adopted.²⁹

Women, then, should ideally be performing the rites within the confines of the inner palace. Why the women's presence caused "difficulties" is not explained, and why women in "later ages" (that is, in Ming times) were not as suitably prepared for ritual practices as were their counterparts in antiquity is also not explained.

Qiu Jun's proposed arrangement of featureless spirit tablets to represent the Exalted Progenitor spirit was a far cry from the colorful images of Buddhist and Daoist temple goddesses that most Ming women would have appealed to for children. No doubt many women would have preferred to go on pilgrimage to ask for children before the images of the immensely popular Goddess of Azure Clouds on Mount Tai in Shandong, where devout followers donated literally baskets of money in the hopes of bearing children. No doubt it was this kind of activity that Qiu Jun railed against elsewhere when he complained of religious charlatans separating the masses from their hard-earned income—although the evidence suggests the devotees considered it money well spent.

Endnotes:

- ¹ Watson, *The Lotus Sutra*, 300. For a recent study of this bodhisattva, or "enlightened being," see Chun-fang Yu, *Kuan-yin*.
- ² For the divinities visited on Mount Tai, see Wu Pei-yi, "An Ambivalent Pilgrimage."
- ³ Qin Huitian, *Wuli tongkao*, 55:20b.
- ⁴ Qiu Jun, *Daxue yanyi bu*, 64:4a. I have discussed Qiu Jun's thought elsewhere in "Destroying Confucius" and "Ch'iu Chun's *On the Conduct of Sacrificial Offerings*."
- ⁵ For an earlier study of this rite in English, see Bodde, *Festivals*. For translations of primary sources concerning women in the Confucian, or literati, tradition, see Mann and Cheng, *Under Confucian Eyes* and Wang, ed., *Images of Women*. For recent scholarship on women in China, consult the journal *Nan Nu: Men, Women, and Gender in Early and Imperial China*.

- ⁶ For those rhapsodies, see the biographies of Dongfang Shuo and Mei Cheng in the *Han Shu*." See also Qin Huitian's *Wuli tongkao*, 55:15a-b.
- ⁷ For sections on the Exalted Progenitor rite, see fascicle 85.
- ⁸ See fascicle 64.
- ⁹ For the usefulness of this text concerning beliefs on procreation and adoption, see Waltner's *Getting an Heir*, 31-32ff.
- ¹⁰ Qiu Jun, *Daxue yanyi bu*, 64:1b.
- ¹¹ *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, s.v. "Wan Kuei-fei."
- ¹² Mencius 4A.26.
- ¹³ Qiu Jun, *Daxue yanyi bu*, 64:3b.
- ¹⁴ Qiu Jun, *Daxue yanyi b*, 64:4a.
- ¹⁵ Qiu Jun, *Daxue yanyi bu*, 64:4a.
- ¹⁶ *Book of Rites*, "Monthly Ordinances" (*Yue ling*). See also Legge, *Li Ki*, 27.259 and Qiu Jun's *Daxue yanyi bu*, 64:2a. I have used the *Shisanjing zhushu* edition of the *Book of Rites* for this study, but for ease of reference I have provided passages from Legge's translation here. For how women participated in ritual traditions in early times, see Raphals, *Sharing the Light*.
- ¹⁷ *Book of Rites*, "Meaning of Archery" (*She yi*). See also Legge, *Li Ki*, 28.448. Archery was not always a man's affair, for in earlier centuries the royal consort Fu Hao (ca. 1200 BCE) was charged with leading military expeditions and was buried with a considerable arsenal. See Zheng, "The Royal Consort."
- ¹⁸ Legge, *Li Ki*, 27.471-472.
- ¹⁹ Legge, *Li Ki*, 27.472.
- ²⁰ Legge, *Li Ki*, 452.
- ²¹ *Book of Odes*, Mao no. 128, "Xiao rong." Following Legge's translation. See his *She King*, 193-195. For how women participated in hermeneutics on the *Odes*, see Zhou, "Virtue and Talent." For English translations of women's poetry, see Chang and Saussy, eds., *Women Writers*.
- ²² Legge, *Li Ki*, 27.470.
- ²³ Legge, *Li Ki*, 27.471.
- ²⁴ *Book of Rites*, "Monthly Ordinances." Legge, *Li Ki*, 27.259.
- ²⁵ Qiu Jun, *Daxue yanyi bu*, 64:4b.
- ²⁶ Qin Huitian, *Wuli tongkao* 55:26b-27a.
- ²⁷ See *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, s.v. "Chu Hou-ts'ung." The empress's rival was also conveniently executed in this incident, which suggests the palace girls may have been framed.
- ²⁸ Qin Huitian, *Wuli tongkao*, 55:26b.
- ²⁹ Qin Huitian, *Wuli tongkao*, 55:28b.

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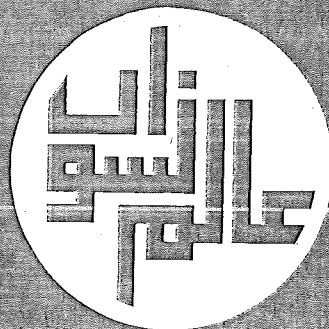
Deborah A. Sommer holds MA, M. Phil, and Ph.D. degrees in religion from Columbia University. Her research explores the classical sacrificial traditions of China, and her current work focuses on visual depictions of the body in Chinese ritual praxis. She has written for the Women's Program of the World Conference on Religion and Peace, and her *Chinese Religion: An Anthology of Sources* (Oxford, 1995) was one of the first teaching texts to include materials on women in Chinese religions. Recent works include a survey of Chinese sacrificial traditions for the two-volume *Crossroad Confucian Spirituality* series (2003 and 2004); studies of later Chinese iconoclasm in *On Sacred Grounds: Culture, Politics, and the Formation of the Cult of Confucius* (T. Wilson, ed.) and in *Ming Studies* (Fall 2004); and extensive contributions to the *Routledge Curzon Encyclopedia of Confucianism* (Yao Xinzong, ed. 2003). In fall 2004 she was a Research Fellow of the Institute for International Research at the Hopkins-Nanjing Center in Nanjing. She chairs the Department of Religion at Gettysburg College.

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