

Chinese Historic Legends & Tales

Get any book for free on: www.Abika.com

Historic Legends & Tales

- [Pan Gu Makes the World](#)
- [Nv Wa Patches up the Sky](#)
- [Huang Di, the Emperor](#)
- [Houyi & Chang'er](#)
- [Yu the Great Conquers the Flood](#)
- [Jie the Tyrant](#)
- [Yi Yin the Wise Counselor](#)
- [Jiang Taigong Angles](#)
- [A Kingdom Lost for a Concubine's Smile](#)
- [King Mu and the Queen Mother of the West](#)
- [The Orphan of the Zhao Family](#)
- [Sun Wu and the Women Warriors](#)
- [Stories about Confucius](#)
- [The King of Yue's Revenge](#)
- [The Loyalty of a Brother and Sister](#)
- [The Return of the Priceless Jade](#)
- [Two Traveling Diplomats](#)
- [Jing Ke and The King of Qin](#)
- [Qu Yuan, the Patriotic Poet](#)
- [Meng Jiangnv: Her Wails Split the Great Wall](#)
- [Death of the First Emperor](#)
- [Xiao He Pursues Han Xin by the Moonlight](#)
- [The Rise and Fall of Xiang Yu](#)
- [Su Wu, Lonely Shepherd of the North](#)
- [Wang Zhaojun: One of the Four Greatest Beauties](#)

Pan Gu Makes the World

In the beginning , the heavens and earth were still one and all was chaos. The universe was like a big black egg, carrying Pan Gu inside itself. After 18 thousand years Pan Gu woke from a long sleep. He felt suffocated, so he took up a broadax and wielded it with all his might to crack open the egg. The light, clear part of it floated up and formed the heavens, the cold, turbid matter stayed below to form earth. Pan Gu stood in the middle, his head touching the sky, his feet planted on the earth. The heavens and the earth began to grow at a rate of ten feet per day, and Pan Gu grew along with them. After another 18 thousand years, the sky was higher, the earth thicker, and Pan Gu stood between them like a pillar 9 million li in height so that they would never join again.



When Pan Gu died, his breath became the wind and clouds, his voice the rolling thunder. One eye became the sun and on the moon. His body and limbs turned to five big mountains and his blood formed the roaring water. His veins became far-stretching roads and his muscles fertile land. The innumerable stars in the sky came from his hair and beard, and flowers and trees from his skin and the fine hairs on his body. His marrow turned to jade and pearls. His sweat flowed like the good rain and sweet dew that nurtured all things on earth. According to some versions of the Pan Gu legend, his tears flowed to make rivers and radiance of his eyes turned into thunder and lightning. When he was happy the sun shone, but when he was angry black clouds gathered in the sky. One version of the legend has it that the fleas and lice on his body became the ancestors of mankind.

The Pan Gu story has become firmly fixed in Chinese tradition. There is even an idiom relating to it: "Since Pan Gu created earth and the heavens", "meaning for a very long time." Nevertheless, it is rather a latecomer to the catalog of Chinese legends. First mention of it in a book on Chinese myths written by Xu Zheng in the Three Kingdoms period (A. D. 220-265). Some opinions hold that it originated in south China or southeast Asia.

There are several versions of the Pan Gu story.

Among the Miao, Yao, Li and other nationalities of south China, a legend concerns Pan Gu the ancestor of all mankind, with a man's body and a dog's head. It runs like this : Up in Heaven the god in charge of the earth, King Gao Xin, owned a beautiful spotted dog. He reared him on a plate (pan in Chinese) inside a gourd (hu, which is close to the sound gu), so the dog was known as Pan Gu . Among the gods there was great enmity between King Gao Xin and his rival King Fang. " Whoever can bring me the head of

King Fang may marry my daughter," he proclaimed, but nobody was willing to try because they were afraid of King Fang's strong soldiers and sturdy horses.

The dog Pan Gu overheard what was said, and when Gao Xin was sleeping, slipped out of the palace and ran to King Fang. The latter was glad to see him standing there wagging his tail. " You see, King Gao Xin is near his end. Even his dog has left him," Fang said , and held a banquet for the occasion with the dog at his side.

At midnight when all was quiet and Fang was over-come with drink, Pan Gu jumped onto the king's bed, bit off his head and ran back to his master with it . King Gao Xin was overjoyed to see the head of his rival, and gave orders to bring Pan Gu some fresh meat. But Pan Gu left the meat untouched and curled himself up in a corner to sleep. For three days he ate nothing and did not stir.

The king was puzzled and asked, " Why don't you eat? Is it because I failed to keep my promise of marrying a dog?" To his surprise Pan Gu began to speak. "Don't worry, my King. Just cover me with your golden bell and in seven days and seven nights I'll become a man." The King did as he said, but on the sixth day, fearing he would starve to death, out of solicitude the princess peeped under the bell. Pan Gu's body had already changed into that of a man, but his head was still that of a dog. However, once the bell was raised, the magic change stopped, and he had to remain a man with a dog's head.

He married the princess, but she didn't want to be seen with such a man so they moved to the earth and settled in the remote mountains of south China. There they lived happily and had four children, three boys and a girl, who became the ancestors of mankind.

In south China Pan Gu is known as King Pan, and temples and pavilions were once built in his honor.

Nv Wa Patches up the Sky

A nearly female figure in Chinese mythology in the goddess Nv Wa (sometimes Nv Kua). According to one legend it was she who was the creator of mankind.

The earth was a beautiful place with blossoming trees and flowers, and full of animals, birds, fish and all living creatures. But as she wandered about it Nv Wa felt very lonely. She bent down and took up a handful of earth, mixed it with water and molded a figure in her likeness. As she kneaded it the figure came alive -the first human being. Nv Wa was so pleased with her creation that she went on making more figures both men and women. They danced around her cheerily and loneliness was dispelled.

Nv Wa is defined in China's earliest dictionary by the philologist Xu Shen (c.58-147) as being " in charge of breeding of all living things", so possibly her origin is associated with fertility.

In some versions of the legend Nv Wa is said to have been both the sister and the wife of Fu Xi, the legendary ruler who was credited with teaching man to domesticate animals and to have taught people matrimony.

Nv Wa and Fu Xi were pictured as having snake like tails interlocked, with a child between them in an Eastern Han dynasty (A. D. 25-220) mural in the Wu-liang Temple in Jiaxiang county, Shandong province. She was credited with, among other things, the invention of the sheng reed pipes.

Another legend tells how she patched up the sky. Two deities, called in one version Gong Gong, the God of Water and Zhu Rong, the God of Fire were in battle. They fought all the way from heaven to earth, causing turmoil everywhere. The God of Fire won, and in anger the God of Water struck his head against Buzhou Mountain (a mythical peak supposed to be northwest of the Kunlun range in southern Xinjiang). The mountain collapsed and down came the big pillar that held heaven from earth. Half the sky fell in, leaving a big black hole. The earth cracked open, forests went up in flames, floodwaters sprouted from beneath the earth and dragons, snakes and fierce animals leaped out at the people. Many people were drowned and more were burned or devoured. It was an unprecedented disaster.

Nv Wa was grieved that mankind which she had created should undergo such suffering. She decided to mend the sky and end this catastrophe. She melted together various kinds of colored stones and with the molten mixture patched up the sky. Then she killed a giant turtle and used its four legs as four pillars to support the fallen part of the sky. She caught and killed a dragon and this scared the other beasts away. Then she gathered and burned a huge quantity of reeds and with the ashes stopped the flood from spreading, so that the people could live happily again.

The only trace left of the disaster, the legend says, was that the sky slanted to the northwest and the earth to the southeast, and so, since then, the sun, the moon and all the stars turn towards the west and all the rivers run southeast.

Huang Di, the Emperor

The Chinese people often refer to themselves as the descendants of Huang Di, the Yellow Emperor, a part-real, part-legendary personage who is credited with founding the Chinese nation around 4,000 B.C. He is known as the Yellow Emperor for his imperial color, chosen for the tones of the yellow earth. Many extravagant tales grew up around him. A collection of legends written down in the Warring States period (475-221 B.C.) gives this account. Huang Di lived in a magnificent palace in the Kunlun Mountains in the west, with a heavenly door keeper who had the face of a man, the body of a tiger and nine tails. The Kunlun Mountains were full of rare birds and animals and exotic flowers and plants, and Huang Di had pet bird that helped take care of his clothes and personal effects.

To Huang Di was attributed invention of the cart, the boat and the south-pointing chariot—a chariot with a gear mechanism that enabled a pointer to always indicate south no matter which way the cart turned. Huang Di is said to have taken one with him in battle. He is credited with the laws of astronomy and drawing up the first calendar used by the Chinese people. His supposed conversations on diagnosis and treatment with the physician Qi Bo are contained in China's first medical book, *Nei Jing* (The Yellow Emperor's Canon of Medicine).

Lei Zu, Huang Di's wife, is said to have taught the people to raise silkworms and weave beautiful silk fabrics. Apparently encouragement of the initiative of talented persons was a thing as much desired then as it is now, for the Warring States account mentions that this was one of Huang Di's strong points. As a result, a whole list of men are credited with inventions. Cang Jie of pictographs; Ling Lun, the twelve tone musical scale; Li Shou, various measuring instruments; and the craftsman Fang Bo who actually built the south-pointing chariot. These things all did come into existence four or five thousand years ago, so in this way the Yellow Emperor has become the symbol of the culture of the Chinese nation and representative of its talents. A pavilion on cypress-covered Mount Qiaoshan in Huangling county on the road north from Xi'an is Shanxi province marks the place said to be his grave. There ceremonies have been performed honoring him as the founder of the Chinese nation. A theory has been advanced that Huang Di may represent a real leader of a tribal confederation of the Yangshao Neolithic culture.

A story which may originate in a memory of tribal wars between Huang Di and Chi You is related in the *Taiping Yulan* compiled by Li Feng and others between 977 and 981. (Chi You is described there in as a god, and in other sources as leader of tribe.) He had 72 brothers (81 by some accounts), all of them with ferocious visages such as a head of bronze and forehead of iron, a human face and the body of an animal. He was skilled at making weapons and casting bronze, and his arrows, axes and spears were unparalleled.

He took his men to Shangdong and attacked the tribe of Yan Di, driving him into Huang Di's territory around Zhuolu in northwestern Hebei province. The latter was angered and went battle with Chi You.

He was no rival for Chi You and at first suffered several defeats. Chi You and at first suffered several defeats. Chi You conjured up a thick fog which blurred the vision of the Yellow Emperor's men. Luckily the south-pointing chariot helped them know their way. Huang Di also had his men make bugles. There were in Chi You's army many spirits, but they were afraid of the sound of a certain kind of dragon. So the Yellow Emperor had his men make instruments out of animal horns which duplicated this sound and the demons were paralyzed with fear.

Chi You called on a god of wind and rain and blew up a tempest, but Huang Di's brought out his daughter who emanated an enormous amount of heat and dried up the storm. Before Chi You's brothers could recover from their surprise Huang Di's forces defeated them.

The last and decisive battle was fought at Zhuolu. Chi You had gone for help to the Kuafu, a clan of giants in the north (its ancestor was Kuafu who raced with the sun and died of thirst) and they drove Huang Di back 50 li. But, using strategy learned from the Goddess of the Ninth Heaven, Huang Di finally defeated them. Chi You retreated until he reached what is today's Shanxi, where he was captured by Huang Di's men and beheaded. To make sure the head would not reunite with the body, Huang Di sent it to be buried a thousand li away. The place where Chi You was beheaded came to be called Xiebian (xie, to sever, and xian, county) and is still known as that today. Nearby there is a salt lake with water of a reddish color, tinted, people say, by Chi You's blood.

After the defeat of Chi You, Huang Di became leader of all the tribes on the central plains. He ruled an area stretching east to the sea, west to today's Gansu province, south to the Changjiang (Yangtze) River and north into today's Shanxi and Hebei provinces. Legend has it that he lived to be 110 years old and then a dragon came and took him back to Heaven where he belonged.

Houyi & Chang'er

The story of Chang'er and her flight to the moon is familiar to every Chinese, and a favorite subject of poets. In his poem " Chang'er ", the famous Tang dynasty poet Li Shangyin (c.813-858) wrote:

Chang'er remorseful for having stolen the elixir
Nightly pines amid the vast sea of the blue sky.

Tradition places Hou Yi and Chang'er in the reign of the legendary emperor Yao, shortly after that of Huang Di. A version of the tale known at least since the Warring States period (475-221 B.C.) describes how, in Yao's reign, ten suns filled the sky. Their heat parched fields, wilted crops , and left people lying breathless and unconscious on the ground. Ferocious animals and birds fled fry rivers and flaming forests to attack human beings.

The immortals in heaven were moved by the people's suffering. The Emperor of Heaven sent the archer Hou (Prince) Yi to help Yao bring order. Hou Yi, with his beautiful wife Chang'er , descended to earth carrying a red bow and white arrows given him by the Emperor of Heaven. People greeted the archer joyfully , as hero who might save them from their torment. Ready for battle, Hou Yi strode to the center of the square, drew his bow and arrows, and tool aim at the imperious suns. In an instant, one after the other, nine suns were shot from the sky. As Hou Yi took aim at the tenth, Yao stopped him -for the last sun might be of benefit to people. So end the story of Hou Yi and the nine suns . Other stories tell of how he slays fierce beasts, birds and snakes, and becomes a hero to the people. But Hou Yi has aroused the jealousy of the other immortals, who slandered him before the Emperor of Heaven. Soon the archer sensed an aloofness, a lack of confidence, in the Emperor's attitude. Finally, Hou Yi and his wife were banished forever from heaven and forced to live by hunting on earth.

This description appears in written form in two Western Han dynasty (206 B. C. -A. D. 24) collections; Shanhajing (Classic of the Mountains and Seas, a book of travels and tales) and Huainanzi (scientific, historical and philosophical articles named for the Prince of Huai).

There are several versions of Chang'er flight to the moon. According to Huainanzi, Hou Yi, sorry that his wife has to lead a mortal's life for his sake, obtained an elixir of immortality from Xiwangmu the Queen Mother of the West. He hoped that, even though condemned to earth, he and his wife could live together happily and forever. Chang'er , however, resented her new hard life, and while Hou Yi was away from home she swallowed all the elixir and flew to the moon.

There, lonely and solitary, she missed the companionship of human beings and the kindness of her husband. Mencius, the Warring States period philosopher, and Huainanzi say that Hou Yi was murdered by Pang Meng, one of his archer was murdered by Pang Meng, one of his archer trainees who hopes to become tip bow-man. Versions differs as to whether Hou YI was beaten to death with a peach -wood club or shot from ambush by an arrow. Another version has Chang'er drink the elixir to keep it from Pang Meng.

A recent dance drama, Flying to the Moon , adds to the story of Hou Yi and Chang'er several new plot twists which resolve the inconsistencies of the older stories and highlight the tragic fate of the couple. In this version, Chang'er is a village girl who marries Hou Yi. Pang Meng the sorcerer-chieftain, seeing his position threatened, tricks Hou Yi into believing that Chang'er has been unfaithful. Still deeply in love with his

wife, Hou Yi feeds her the elixir of immortality and banishes her to the moon. Too late, he realizes his error, and dies gazing at her image in the sky.

The noted historian Gu Jiegang (1893-1980), in a study of Huainanzi and other classics, uncovered some stories making Hou Yi's soul reincarnated in the legendary hero Zhong Kui. Zhong Kui, appearing in a dream to a Tang dynasty emperor, claimed that his mission in life was to destroy all the evils that plagued human beings. Professor Gu pointed out that both Hou Yi and Zhong Kui were revered by the ancient Chinese as heroes who dedicated their powers to the service of humanity.

Yu the Great Conquers the Flood

Yu The Great, the best loved and best known of several legendary rulers, is now considered to have been an actual person, the first King of the Xia dynasty (c. 21st-16th centuries B. C.). Perhaps many incidents in man's dim memory of battle against flood have collected around his figure to form the legend.

As the story goes, a great flood inundated the valley of the Huanghe (Yellow) River. It covered even the hills, so that the people could get no food. King Shun ordered the official Yu to control it. Yu organized the princes who ruled various localities and the people in them to cut channels and build other projects to drain the waters away to the sea. He worked for 13 years before bringing the flood under control.

His betrothed was Nu Jiao, described as a quiet and beautiful maiden. While he was busy with his flood controlling work she sent her maid every day to the southern foot of Tushan Hill to wait for him to pass, but he did not appear. So dedicated was he that, though in 13 years he passed his door three times, he did not stop. Nu Jiao, so the story goes, wrote a song which ran, "Waiting for you, the time seems so long..." At least an ancient song exists with these words, and people attribute it to her. Finally he came home and they were married. But four days he left again for his engineering projects.

The first written account of the story of Yu appears in The Book of History, which is made up of a number of ancient pieces supposedly collected and edited by Confucius in the fourth century B.C.

Some people feel that the Confucian stress on devotion to duty, taught by Yu's example down through the ages, had been a force in molding the Chinese character.

Before Yu's efforts, his father, Gun, had been in charge of flood control. The Book of History account says that rather than draining Gun had tried to contain the waters with dikes, but the water rose higher and higher, creating even greater havoc. After nine years Gun had not succeeded in controlling them, so he was executed on Mt. Yu(said to be in Shandong province).

The famous poet Qu Yuan (c.340-278B.C.) in his poem " Questions to Heaven", however, implies that Gun was killed because he was an upright man, and other ancient poems and legends also picture him as a hero. One has him stealing from heaven a kind of magic earth which could grow by itself. A handful of it grew into a dike which blocked the flood and absorbed then water. Refugees who had climbed up into the trees to escape the water came down and rebuilt their homes. They were most grateful to him. However, just as the flood was about to be brought under control, the Emperor of Heaven found out about the theft. In fury he sent the God of Fire down to the world to kill Gun on cold, dark Mt. Yu and take back the magic earth. So the flood returned and swallowed up the people's new homes. Some versions say Gun became a yellow bear after his death, others, a dragon-like fish. The most popular is that he went on fighting the flood after his death.

A great many legends have grown up around Yu and Gun. One is that after Gun was killed his body did not decay for three years and Yu grew inside it. Another says that Yu asked a dragon named Yinglong to draw a line with its tail, and along that line he dug channels which guided the waters eastward to the sea. Still another has it that Yu got from the God of Rivers a map of the rivers which helped him draw up his flood-control plan. This suggests that rudimentary scientific knowledge was being applied by that time.

The Yu story has become attached to several natural sites, even some far afield form the original Huanghe valley. Near Sanmen (Three Gate) Gorge on the Huanghe in Henan province there are seven pits resembling wells which people like to say were dug by Yu. A large stone formation with a print like a great horseshoe nearby, they say, was left when Yu leaped over the Sanmen Gorge on horseback. On the Changjiang (Yangtze) River in Sichuan's Wushan county above the famous gorges there is an inlet leading off the river valley to nowhere About this it is said a stupid dragon started digging a wrong watercourse, and Yu killed it. There one finds places named Cuokai (Wrongly Opened) and Dragon-killing Terrace.

Yu's outstanding service won him the trust of the people. After the death of King Shun, Yu became chief of the tribal confederation on the central plains. Archaeologists are excavating what may be Yu's capital south Zhengzhou in Henan province, Yu died in what is today's Shanxing in coastal Zhejiang province, where there is a tomb said to be his.

Jie the Tyrant

Tales that have grown up about Jie, last king of the Xia dynasty (c. 21st-16th centuries B. C.), picture him as highly intelligent and immensely strong, able to subdue wild beasts and straighten hooks of -interestingly enough-iron with his bare hands. He made continual forays into neighboring state.

In the state of Youshi (in today's southern Shandong province) to the east of Xia was a woman named Meixi famed for her beauty. He invaded Youshi and forced it to surrender her. Then he mounted an expedition against the state of Minshan to the west (in northern Sichuan province) and made it pay him a huge tribute in gold and precious stones and give him two beautiful maidens, Wan and Yan. He also conquered the state of Min (southwestern Shandong), and enslaved its entire population.

In his own country, Jie made his subjects build lavish palaces and places of entertainment for him . One palace almost outstripped the technology of his day and , it is said, was built so high that it seemed on the verge of collapsing. So it was called Qinggong- the Tottering Palace. Later historical accounts describe its magnificence with corridors inlaid with ivory, beds of white jade, and painted pillars, carved beams and tapestry-hung windows in all of its innumerable chambers. To further embellish his palace, Jie ordered his vassals to gather and send him rare treasures, and to select the most beautiful women from among the populace to live in it. Of dancing girls alone, he had some 3,000.

The book Biographies of Famous Women written by Liu Xiang in the first century B. C. relates that Jie had a pond big enough for rowing boats dug in his garden and filled with wine. He ordered chunks of cooked meat stacked on the surrounding hillsides and tasty viands hung on the trees. Here he spent his days carousing with his beauties.

In his dissipation Jie paid no attention to affairs of state. He once spent more than a hundred days in the depths of his palace without seeing his ministers, who were highly incensed. One of them remonstrated with him, saying, " The kings and emperors of old have always husbanded the strength of their people. Your luxury and extravagance will certainly bring about the downfall of the country." Jie merely laughed. " Everything under heaven belongs to me," he said. "I am like the sun in the sky. Will the sun ever be extinguished?" And he went on with his carousing.

Another minister named Guan Longfeng, sickened by his monarch's behavior, went to him a few days later with a scroll on which was painted portrait of Yu the Great ,founder of the dynasty, curbing the flood waters that had ravaged the land . King Jie should keep in mind how hard his ancestors had worked to establish the dynasty, the minister said, other wise the country was doomed. Jie flew into a rage and ordered his attendants to wrest the scroll from Guan and throw it into the fire. Guan continued to argue with Jie until he was taken out and beheaded.

After that Jie became even more arrogant and self-willed. In fits of rage he would decree cruel punishments for innocent people, such as having their noses or feet cut off, simply to assert his absolute authority.

The people of Xia hated Jie. Since he had likened himself to the sun , they would point to the sun and say, "When will you perish! Let it be soon, even it means that we perish with you !"

Meanwhile the new and powerful Shang state had risen . Its ruler Tang, who is pictured as an upright man , had united several tribes. Jie's dissipation made Xia a prime target for conquest.

A great battle between Xia and Shang took place at Wutiao , north of today's Kaifeng in Henan province. Jie remained arrogant and autocratic up to the time of his demise. Believing himself to be invincible, he did not take the impending battle seriously. In fact, he took along many of his beauties and continued his revels at the front. On the day before the battle he told them, " This will be even more fun to watch than a hunt. I'll take you along. I've never been defeated ."

But things turned out contrary to Jie's expectations. Soon after the battle began, a heavy storm blew up and the Xia force, whose training has been neglected, fell into confusion. The Shang forces, on the other hand, fought with dogged perseverance. Jie, watching the battle from a mountain top, realized that he had lost and ordered a retreat. Tang pursued the fleeing Jie's army all the way to the Xia capital . Jie was forced to flee, but was captured by Tang and kept in exile till he died.

Yi Yin the Wise Counselor

Yi Yin is one of those types that recur frequently in Chinese folklore-the wise counselor who gives his monarch honest advice and has the interests of the people at heart. That such figures are made popular culture heroes undoubtedly reflects the fact that most imperial officials over the centuries displayed anything but these virtues.

Legend gives Yi much of the credit for the establishment of the Shang dynasty (16th-11th centuries B. C.). In his youth, it is said, he became outraged by the misrule and foul practices of the tyrant Jie of Xia. His solution was to help overthrow Jie and to make his own monarch, Prince Tang of Shang, ruler of all China.

Tradition of describe Yi as personally unprepossessing-short, swarthy and bearded, his pudgy frame distorted by a hump on his back- and totally uninterested in the clothes he wore. His wit and sagacity, however, seem to have outweighed his looks. One account says that he brought himself to the attention of Tang by first disguising himself as a slave in the household of a noble whose daughter was about to marry Tang. Yi was sent along to court as part of the dowry. He gradually won Tang's respect and was raised to the position of court minister.

In another version, Yi was a peasant who has wise things to say on matters of state. Tang heard of him and wanted to make him a advisor. Five times he went to Yi before the latter would consent. Tang's charioteer, a fellow named Peng, was said to be highly incensed: " What airs this peasant puts on ! If you want him, just summon him. Why should you go to him time after time?" Whereupon Tang replied "You don't understand. In going to Yi I'm like a sick man seeking the assistance of a good doctor. And not for myself, but to save the people of the country."

This is all very much in the mode of tales surrounding changes in dynasty. Founders of new dynasties -in this case Yi and Tang -are invariably endowed with every upright virtue, while the last representatives of falling dynasties, such as Jie, are represented as evil tyrants. Tang is said to have asked Yi what he should do to strengthen his rule. Yi's reply:" Cultivate you moral character and resolve to work for the benefit of the people. Enlist in your service men of virtue and ability. Rule your domain with humanity and justice."

Yi rendered Tang great service in his campaign to conquer Xia. Once Tang, impatient to launch an attack, was persuaded by Yi to hold off while the sounded out Xia's strength. On Yi's advice Tang deliberately withheld tribute payments to Jie of Xia. Jie Promptly flew into a rage and summoned the armies of his vassal dukes and princes. When reports indicated that the troops were duly assembling for punitive expedition against Tang, Yi told his master: "We can't attack now, while Jie is still powerful. Better wait."

The next year Tang again procrastinated over the tribute. And Jie once more called up his vassals. But this time many were reluctant to obey. " Now is the time, "said Yi. " Jie's command are no longer effective."

The Shang armies gained a series of victories, first conquering a number of Jie's vassal states and then bearing down on the Xia capital. They were only five li from its forces when Yi suddenly called a halt. The bewildered Tang asked why. His advisor calmly replied that army's morale needed bolstering. " but my army has won every battle it has fought !" protested Tang. " True," replied Yi, " but up to now we have fought smaller states. This time we are dealing with the monarch of a big state, and this battle will decide the fate of a dynasty. We cannot afford to be careless.

So Yi assembled the army and Tang addressed them. He dwelt on the iniquities of Jie and declared that his own rebellion against the tyrant accorded with the will of Heaven and the people. This speech, known to history as " Tang's pledge, " bolstered the spirits of the troops. In the ensuing battle Jie the tyrant was finally defeated.

Tang went on to found the Shang dynasty and appointed Yi his prime minister. After Tang's death Yi continued to advise his sons and successor, Wai Bing and Zhong Ren. Upon the death of the latter, Tang's grandson Tai Jia ascended the throne, and the aging Yi came to serve his fourth monarch.

One of his first " service" was to send the young Tai Jia into exile. Yi at this time held the high position of Ah Heng, or guardian and instructor of the monarch. He was a strict teacher, but Tai Jia was engrossed in his own amusements and showed little concern for affairs of state. Things went from bad to worse, until Yi declared himself regent and sent Tai Jia to a place called Tongguan (southwest of today's Yanshi county seat in Henan province). Tang's tomb was situated there, and Yi considered it an appropriate spot for the boy to reflect on his wayward behavior.

Yi's motives were of course misunderstood. Court officials whispered among themselves that Yi intended to usurp the throne. Yi disregarded their suspicions in the firm conviction that he was acting in the public interest.

Back at Tongguan, Tai Jia was overcome with shame at his past behavior and decided to turn over a new leaf. After three years Yi was satisfied that the young king had really mended his ways, so on a propitious day he himself went to Tongguan with the royal crown and robes. Tai Jia was returned to the thrown and became an able and enlightened ruler. So pleased was Yi with his monarch's reformation that he wrote an article entitled "The Exemplary Conduct of Tai Jia." The story of the incident is known as " Yi Yin Exiles Tai Jia."

Yi Yin lived to a venerable old age. Tai Jia himself having died, his son Wo Ding buried the old prime minister with the rites usually reserved for an emperor.

Jiang Taigong Angles

The story of Jiang Taigong has been used on many levels in China. At its simplest it may be said to be an example of patience, or the philosophy that if you wait long enough things will come your way. A more sophisticated message applicable in military and political strategy is: Wait until circumstances ripen.

He is a real historical character named Jiang Shang (also known as Jiang Ziya) who in the 11th century B.C.) became advisor to King Wen and his son King Wu, founder of the Zhou dynasty (1122-771 B.C.).

The last ruler of the Shang dynasty (16th-11th century B.C.) was a tyrannical and debauched slaveowner who spent his days carousing with his favorite concubine Daji and mercilessly executing or punishing upright official and all others who objected. Jiang Shang had once served the Shang King and had come to hate him with all his heart. He was an expert in military affairs and hoped that some day someone would call on him to help overthrow the king . He waited and waited till he was 80 years old, continuing placidly with his fishing in a tributary of the Weihe River (near today's Xi'an in the Shanxi Province). Some versions of the story have him using a barbless hook or even no hook at all, on the theory that the fish would come to him of their own volition when they were ready.



According to the story, King Wen of the Zhou state, which had risen in central Shaanxi, came along and found Jiang Shang fishing. King Wen, following the advice of his father and grandfather before him, was in search of talented people. In fact, he had been told by his grandfather, the Grand Duke of Zhou, that one day a sage would appear to help rule the Zhou state. When King Wen saw Jiang Shang, at first sight he felt that this was an unusual old man, and began to converse with him. He discovered that this white-haired fisherman was actually an astute political thinker and military strategist. This, he felt, must be the man his grandfather was waiting for. He took Jiang Shang in his coach to the court and appointed his prime minister and gave him the title Jiang Taigongwang (Hope of the Duke of Zhou). This was later shortened to Jiang Tai Gong.

An account of Jiang Taigong's life written long after his time says he held that a country could become powerful only when the people prospered. If the officials enriched themselves while the people remained poor, the ruler would not last long. The major principle in ruling a country should be to love the people; and to love the people meant to reduce taxes and corvee labor. By following these ideas, King Wen is said to have made the Zhou state proper very rapidly.

After King Wen died, his son King Wu, who inherited the throne, decided to send troops to overthrow the King of Shang. But Jiang Taigong stopped him, saying: "While I was fishing at Panxi, I realized one truth: If you want to succeed you need to be patient . We must wait for the appropriate opportunity to eliminate the King of Shang. "Soon it was reported that the people of Shang were so oppressed that no one dared speak. King Wu and Jiang Taigong decided this was the time to attack, for the people had lost faith in the ruler. A bloody battle was fought at Muye (35 Kilometers from the Shang capital Yin, now Anyang in Henan province). Jiang Taigong charged at the head of the troops, beat the battle drums and then with 100 of his men drew the Shang troops to the southwest. King Wu's troops moved quickly and surrounded the capital. The Shang King had sent relatively untrained slaves to fight. This, plus the fact that many surrendered or revolted, enabled Zhou to take the capital.

The Shang king set fire to his palace and perished in it, and King Wu and his successors as the Zhou dynasty established rule over all of China. As for Daji, one version has it that she was captured and executed, another that she took her own life. Jiang Taigong was made duke of the State of Qi (today's Shandong province), which thrived with better communications and exploitation of its fish and salt resources under him.

The figure of Jiang Taigong has for long captured the popular imagination. He was credited with having written a military book Liutao (Six Strategies). Many legends grew up around him over the years. They were collected in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) fictional work Fengshen Yanyi (Tales of Gods and Heroes).

In the river near Xi'an there is a big stone with an indentation said to have been worn there as Jiang Taigong sat fishing. A bearded fisherman is frequently seen in miniature carvings ---the figure is traditionally that of Jiang Taigong.

A Kingdom Lost for a Concubine's Smile

King You, last ruler of the Western Zhou dynasty (11th century -- 771 B.C.) had a penchant for beautiful women. One of the court sycophants, wanted to curry favor with him, suggested, "The women of the court are getting old. It's about time we chose some younger ones from the neighboring states."

It happened that a very small vassal state named Bao, having failed to send in its tribute in time, was being attacked by Zhou troops. A compromise was arranged in which Bao provided ten beautiful women instead.

The most dazzling of the ten, whose name was (Baosi, became the king's favorite. He took her everywhere with him, even on hunting expeditions. Baosi had one strange characteristic. She never smiled. However, she let it be known that she liked to hear the sound of tearing silk, so the king ordered that every day a hundred bolts of silk be torn before her by strong housemaids. Still this did not bring a smile to her face. The king dethroned his queen and her son the prince and placed Baosi and her infant child in their stead, but still she did not smile.

One day the king took Baosi on an excursion to the Lishan Mountains east of his capital Haojing (west of today's Xi'an). There she showed interest in a beacon tower which was used to alert nearby vassal states to send troops to the aid of Zhou. Hoping to please

Baosi, the king ordered the beacon fire lit. When the vassal troops gathered at the foot of Lishan they found no sign nor sound of battle, but only the music of *lusheng* pipes as King You disported with Baosi. The dukes of the vassal states were extremely angry as they lowered their banners, muffled their retreat from the tower, Baosi let out a peal of laughter. King You was so pleased that after that he often took her to Lisahn and lit the beacon fire. Soon it became meaningless as an alarm.

In 771 B.C. Zhou rule was under attack from the Quanrong tribesmen in the north. In conspiracy with troops inside Zhou under the leadership of the brother of the dethroned queen, they approached the capital Haojing. King You ordered the beacon fire lighted, but the neighboring dukes ignored it and the Quanrong captured Haojing. King You and Baosi were captured. The king was killed at the foot of Lishan Mountains and the latter given to the Quanrong king.

A modern reader might well ask whether Baosi, resenting having been sent to the king, acted as she did for revenge, but ancient historians do not tell us this. In keeping with their anti-female bias, she was blamed for the fall of the dynasty.

King Mu and the Queen Mother of the West

The origin of Xiwangmu, the Queen Mother of the West, has given rise to some fascinating speculations, and there are many tales about her. In the Shanhaijing (Book of Mountains and Seas) She is depicted as a fearsome creature with a leopard's tail and tiger's fangs, ruling over plague . But in other legends, She is an elegant and charming person, fond of singing. In the story of Chang'e and her husband Hou Yi the Sun-shooter , it is from her that the latter obtains an elixir of immortality.

One of the most popular tales about Xiwangmu concerns a visit to her by King Mu, fifth ruler of the Western Zhou dynasty (11th century -711 B. C.). He is famous for a great journey westward beyond the bounds of his realm. Starting from near Luoyang, he is said to have traveled northward to Shanxi and the Huanghe River valley district and then westward across Qinghai to today's Xinjiang. Many modern historians doubt that he really traveled that far, an enormous distance for those days . The western regions were almost unknown to the people of central China, and fanciful tales about the people and places to be found there were common.

Tales of King Mu , written during the warring States period (475-221 B. C.) says that far to the west he encountered a large lake , called Pearl Lake by the natives, where pearls and jade could be found. The water was clear and full of fish, and Mu had a fine time fishing and enjoying the scenery. When they reached a place named Chunshabn (near

today's Congling Mountains), they found the slopes blanketed with flowers and numerous rare birds and animals.

They went on to the Kunlun Mountains where they visited Xiwangmu in her palace beside a lake named Yaochi (Jasper, an attractive colored stone). He presented her with jade of exquisitely fine quality and three hundred bolts of brocade. She entertained him at a banquet beside the lake feasting him with fabulous fruits and delicacies. Among them were a lotus that bloomed in winter with pods containing a hundred seeds, black dates two feet long from trees that bore every hundred years, and crisp, cool peaches that ripened only every ten thousand years, and conferred immortality on those who tasted them.

At the banquet, hostess and guest improvised poems for the occasion. The queen's ran :

*White clouds in the sky.
Come from the mountains.
Distinguished guest from afar land
Separated by mountains and rivers.
May you live long
And return to us soon.
King Mu responded with:
To the east I go,
But I will return,
When my people are prosperous
And the country strong.
Wait for three years
Until we meet again.*

King Mu lived for over a hundred years, but there is no record of a second journey to see the queen. On his return to the Zhou capital, his ministers complained that the trip had been too long and too extravagant. The state treasury was almost bare. Faced with the poverty of his people, Mu, who is known as a relatively conscientious ruler, gave up the idea of further travels. The incident was immortalized in a poem written some 1,800 years later by the Tang dynasty poet Li Shangyin (813-858).

After studying the most ancient records in which the queen Mother of the West is mentioned , modern scholars advance the story that Xiwangmu may well have been the chieftain of a western tribe ---possibly a woman, but more likely a man—whose name, phonetically translated into Chinese , suggested a queen mother.

In Tales of Xiwangmu written in the Han dynasty (206 B. C. -A. D. 220) she is pictured as a beautiful woman of 30 who visited the Western Han dynasty emperor Wu Di (r. 156-87 B.C.) and on his birthday presented him with peaches of immortality .

Other myths created a pose for her named Dongwanggong (King Father of the Eastern Paradise) who she met once a year. In stories and operas produced in later years she was

known as the Golden Mother of Yao chi, who banqueted the immortals on the peaches on her birthday, which occurred when the peaches were ripe. It is from one of these banquets that Monkey King Sun Wukong stole the peaches and got into a lot of trouble.

The Orphan of the Zhao Family

In the state of Jin in today's southern Shanxi province during and Autumn period (770-476 B. C.),the reigning monarch Duke Jing became jealous of the growing power and popularity of an upright minister named Zhao Shuo. The duke decided to eliminate zhao, and found a ready ally in the clever and unscrupulous court official Tu Angu.

The wily Tu began to spread false rumors about Zhao and his two brothers, Zhao Tong and Zhao Kuo. His big chance came when a landslide in the mountains blocked river traffic. Tu blamed the disaster on the misdeeds of the Zhao brothers. In those days, natural calamities were often believed to be signs of heavenly disfavor caused by the evil actions of rulers or officials.

Seizing this chance, the duke sent armed troops to attack the Zhao mansion. An official signboard was posted before the house branding the Zhaos as criminals. The soldiers mercilessly slaughtered every member of the family , and even the servants. When the massacre was over, several hundred people lay dead. But among the bodies Tu Angu could not find that of Zhao Shuo's wife Zhuang Ji - who also happened to be the aunt of Duke Jing.

Zhao Shou had been warned beforehand by his friend Han Jue of the plot against his family. He saw no hope of resisting the duke's power, but if his pregnant wife could be taken into hiding, the family line might still survive. Entrusting her to one of his men, Cheng Ying, Zhao told her "If it is a boy , name him Zhao Wu and tell him to revenge us. " The sorrowing woman was hidden in a remote part of the royal palace.

The false counselor Tu Angu discovered Zhuang Ji's hiding place and urged Duke Jing to put her to death. The duke was naturally reluctant to have his own aunt killed. And Tu tried hard to persuade him, saying , " The princess herself is not the danger. But she bears a child of the Zhao family. When the child grows up it could bring disaster. You cannot ignore this. " So the duke decreed that if the child turned out to be a boy, he should be slain immediately.

Zhuang Ji did give birth to a son. The boy was hidden and faithful servant spread the news that a girl baby had been born, and died soon after. Tu Angu did not believe it. He promised a huge reward to anyone who would reveal the whereabouts of the child . And whoever concealed him would be executed together with his whole family. Guards stationed at the palace gates questioned and searched everyone going in or out.

Meanwhile Cheng Ying and Gongsun Chujiu, another loyal friend of the Zhao family, came up with a bold plan to save the infant. But carrying it out would involve great sacrifices. Gongsun asked Cheng " Which is easier, do you think ----dying for the child or staying alive to protect and raise him ?" Cheng answered, " Dying is easier. " Gongsun's reply:" Ten I choose the easier part. "

So the plan went into effect . Cheng , pretending to be an informer, went to Tu Angu and told him that Zhao's son had been secretly hidden in Gongsun's house. Tu was delighted and immediately took some soldiers to arrest Gongsun. In the basement of his house they found a baby wrapped in silk and brocade. Actually, this was Cheng's youngest son. Tu ordered that both the infant and Gongsun be put to death . Before the execution Gongsun pretended to be very angry and cursed his " faithless " friend Cheng who in turn contrived to look guilty and defiant.

Believing that the danger was over, Tu called off the massive search. His late father's friend Han Jue then smuggled the real Zhao infant out of the palace and give it into Cheng's care. Cheng took the boy to a mountain hideout and for fifteen years raised him as his father would have wished.

In the meantime , Duck Jing had died and Duke Dao succeeded him appointed Han Jue to high position and dismissed dishonest officials including Tu Angu. The new duke also believed that the Zhao brothers had been treated unjustly, and expressed his sorrow that none of the family remained alive. Han then revealed the truth and Dao ordered the young man brought to court.

Zhao Wu and his teacher Cheng Ying were over-joyed. When Tu's treachery was revealed , justice was done at last. The family property was resorted to young Zhao Wu, and Tu and all his family were executed (in those days considered the supreme penalty and deterrent to evil-doers).

Duke Dao wanted to reward Cheng Ying for his faithful service, but Cheng refused . " I endured many humiliations and lived for this day when I could see the boy grown and vengeance done. It would not be just to take any reward while Gongsun lies in his grave. " He then took his own life . The duke had him buried together with Gongsun and erected a monument inscribed " Tomb of Two Heroes. "

The story of the Zhao family was recorded in the Historical Records by Sima Qian (2nd century B. C.) and in the New Anecdotes by Liu Xiang (77-6 B.C.). Capturing the popular imagination , it has been retold in many forms. Ji Junxiang, a dramatist of the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) wrote a play called Zhao Family orphan. In the 18th century this play, in translation, became a favorite of European audiences.

Sun Wu and the Women Warriors

Sun Wu, known to history as Sun Zi (Philosopher Sun)was a great military strategist of the 5th century B.C. "A native of the State of Qi, he was once summoned by King He Lu of the State of Qi, he was once summoned by King He Lu of the State of Wu in the lower Changjiang (Yangtze) valley. " I've read all of your thirteen articles on military strategy and tactics, " said the king, " and I want you to command my army, at least on a trial basis. " Sun Wu willingly accepted.

Sun Wu had claimed that discipline was the key to any army's effective. The King wanted to test his abilities. " Would your training methods work even with women ?" With Sun Wu's agreement, the king assembled 180 of his concubines to be trained. Sun Wu divided them into two companies and appointed two company commanders.

The women were asked whether they knew their right hands from their left, and back from front. Then Sun Wu told them how to carry out military orders: " When the drum signals a left turn, you must turn to your left; when it signal, turn completely around ." So the general raised his battle-axe , the drum signaled a right turn- and the women stood there and laughed .

"Perhaps the rules are not clear and you are not familiar with orders. That's my fault. " Sun Wu patiently reiterated the rules and the drum sounded again. And again the women laughed and made no move. " The first time was my fault, " Sun Wu patiently reiterated the rules and the drum sounded again. And again the women laughed and made no move . " The first time was my fault," said the general . " But now I have repeated the instructions and you still do not follow , so the blame is on you." He ordered both company commander executed.

The king was stunned : " I cannot live without these two women ! I hope you'll spare them." But Sun Wu replied, " You have appointed me your commanding general, and I must exercise a general's authority. " The executions were carried out, and the next-ranking women appointed commander. The orders were given again, and this time the terrified women followed instructions exactly.

Sun Wu turned to the king: " The women's companies are now at your service." The unhappy king said : " Please return to your home. I don't want to see you any more." The general then asked gravely whether the monarch's professed admiration for good military strategy was only talk, or was he willing to put it into practice. King He Lu took the point and confirmed Sun Wu*s authority. The women's troop, which started as a joke , which started as joke , later became an effective fighting force.

With Sun Wu at their head, the Wu troops defeated the powerful State of Chu in the west and occupied its capital, thereafter threatening the states of Qi (in what is now Shandong province) and Jin to the northwest and becoming a dominant power in the area.

The story of Sun Wu and women warriors appears in the Historical Records written by Sima Qian in the first century B. C. The exact dates of Sun Wu's birth and death are not recorded. His father was a high official of the state of Qi who fled that country after a

disagreement with the authorities and lived as a hermit with his young son in the Luofu Mountains.

King He Lu is said to have respected talented people. He invited Sun Wu to his court on the advice of his senior counselor Wu Zixu. After 30,000 Wu troops under Sun's command had defeated a huge Chu army of 200,000, the king offered his general an important position and great wealth. But Sun refused, and when the fighting was over he took with him only several cartloads of brocade which he distributed to people along his way back to the Luofu Mountains.

King He Lu is said to have respected talented people. He invited Sun Wu to his court on the advice of his senior Wu Zixu. After 30,000 Wu troops under Sun's command had defeated a huge Chu army of 200,000, the King offered his general an important position and great wealth. But Sun refused, and when the fighting was over he took with him only several cartloads of brocade which he distributed to people along his way back to the Luofu Mountains.

The history books record no other details of Sun's life, but his book, Sun Zi's Art of War, has become a classic down through the centuries. The principles he expounded are considered so relevant that they are studied today not only in China but in military academies around the world .

Stories About Confucius

Confucius (551-479 B. C.) is remembered by Chinese of all levels of life for various reasons. One noticeable one is his approach to education. he stimulated his students to think by posing questions. He also maintained that the molding of the personality was of prime importance in education, and everything else followed from this. Thus, if the tales told after him have any truth in them, he tailored his methods to each student's needs.

His teaching style was more in the way of informal conversations than formal classes. Roughly speaking, his discourse covered three fields, the classics and philosophy, including his views on reforms which would bring the government of the ducal states back to what he considered the ideal of ancient times, the forms and ceremonies of those past times; and poetry and music.

He was an avid lover of music, which he once remarked could help mold kindness and uprightness of character. Wherever he went in his travels though the states, he collected the songs of the people, which he used in his teaching, and near the end of his life edited the ancient collection *The Book of Songs*.

Altogether at one time or another some 3,000 young men came to study under him. The 72 who were the brightest and spent the most time with him came to be known as his disciples. Some of them went with him on his travels to other states.

Most devoted among them was Zi Lu, by nature rather brash and very courageous but lacking in tactics. Confucius warned him more than once to use caution. One story goes that Zi Lu asked Confucius, "If you were to lead an army, who would you take with you to the battlefield?"

Confucius' reply was: "I would certainly not take anyone who dreamed of killing a tiger bareheaded. Neither would I take anyone who behaved rashly and wanted to cross a river without any preparation. I would take with me someone cool-headed and prudent."

Zi Lu developed into a person with political insight. He traveled to the State of Wei with Confucius and when Confucius left, Zi Lu and another student stayed on to serve the Duke of Wei in important positions. When Confucius later heard that the other would return but that Zi Lu would die, for he knew that his honest and upright man would not turn with the tide. Son the news reached Confucius that Zi Lu had been killed in battle, and he wept bitterly for his student.

Another story is about his relation with Yan Hui, who is the one said to have carried out Confucius' ideas most faithfully. He led a hard life, but never let it deter him from his studies. Confucius once said of him, "I doubt that I can find another person who is so attentive, diligent and consistent in his studies as Han Hui. . . . He eats coarse grain, drinks nothing but water and lives in a small narrow lane. To anyone else this would be depressing, but not Yan Hui. He is always happy and always studies hard."

But Confucius criticized Yan Hui for being too obedient and not having independent views. "Yan Hui accepts everything I say," he observed. "That's neither good for him nor for me."

Gongye Chang was another of his students. He was imprisoned on a charge that Confucius believed to be unfounded. As a gesture of his faith in him Confucius announced that he was willing to offer one of his daughters to be his wife.

One tale may be taken as an illustration of his consideration of differences. Zi Lu asked him a question, "When we hear a good proposal, should we put it into practice at once?" "You should always first ask someone with more experience," Confucius answered the same question. To him Confucius replied, "Of course you should put it into practice at once." A third student who had heard both answers, puzzled by their apparent contradiction, asked Confucius about it.

"Ran You always hesitates when making a decision," the sage said. "Therefore he should be encouraged to be bolder. Zi Lu tends to make hasty decisions. Therefore he should be reminded to be cautious. It's only natural that different people should get different answers.

When Confucius died at the age of 73, some of his disciples put up huts beside his grave and lived in them for three years in mourning. One by the name of Zi Gong did not feel this was enough, so he stayed on for three more years. Today visitors to Confucius see a small cottage standing to the right of it, which, rebuilt many times in after years, stands on the site of Zi Gong's hut.

The King of Yue's Revenge

The King of Yue and his wife were made to work as slaves for three years in the State of Wu. The defeated the State of Yue in a battle in 494 B. C. The two states - Yue in today's Zhejiang province on the east coast and Wu to the north around what is today the city of Suzhou (Jiangsu province) - were contending for hegemony over the lower Changjiang (Yangtze) River valley, and after the defeat Yue had to pledge allegiance to Wu.

Fu Chai, the king of Wu, did everything he could to insult the Yue couple. Gou Jian, the King of Yue, was forced to live in a small stone hut beside the tomb of Fu Chai's father who had died fighting Yue. Every time the King of Wu went on tour the made the King of Yue lead his horse, subjecting him to derisive comments from the populace about " our king's groom. " With rancor in his heart, the King of Yue accepted such treatment only because then his state would be allowed to exist. his people would not be bothered, and he might find an opportunity to make a comeback - he hoped.

During his time in Wu, the King of Yue forced himself to always appear humble and respectful. Dressed in a tattered sacking and a battered hat, he industriously cared for the horses. His wife, wearing shabby clothing, fetched water, did the cooking and swept the stables and courtyard.

Fan Li, one of his officials, had come with them, and he too assumed such a mien, never uttering a word of complaint. Those sent by the King of Wu to spy on them found nothing suspicious to report, so gradually the King of Wu began to relax his vigilance.

One day the King of Wu fell ill. The king of Yue asked for permission to see the ailing king to show his loyalty. " I know a little about medicine, " he told Fu Chai, " and can judge a patient's condition from the flavor of his stool. " He tasted the ailing man's stool and announced that he would soon recover. This act made a big impression on the King of Wu. He had not originally intended to honor his word about keeping Gou Jian for only three years, but now, moved by the latter's seeming loyalty, he decided to release him and even gave him a big sendoff with a banquet.

After Gou Jian returned to Yue, the humiliation that had been forced on him ranked within. Over his bed he hung a gall. before every meal and at bedtime he would taste a bit of its bitter substance. To strengthen his resolve, he gave up his luxurious palace and slept on a pallet of brush wood in a thatched hut. (These two hardships he imposed on himself have brought into the Chinese language a four-word phrase wo xin chang dan, meaning hardships to strengthen resolve to wipe out national humiliation).

The king of Yue and his wife lived like common people, he working in the fields and she weaving and sewing clothes. He issued a decree exempting farmers from taxes for seven years. Historical writings credit him with helping the poor and recognizing the worth of talented people and scholars. He placed in important positions Fan Li, who had gone with him, and General Wen Zhong, whom he had deputed to administer the state in his absence. Before long Yue began to recoup its strength.

Fan li conceived a brilliant scheme.: Knowing that the King of Wu had a tendency to dissipation and extravagance. Fan Li proposed to further undermine Wu rule with the gift of an enticing woman. Disguised as a merchant, he toured Yue, seeking the most beautiful maidens. He found Xi Shi, the loveliest and most graceful woman he had ever seen, washing silk in a stream in a remote village.

When the plan was explained to her father, he agreed that Xi Shi must do what was wanted. Thus Xi Shi became the most famous of the long line of beauties who traditional Chinese history writing holds responsible for the fall of states. Xi Shi, however, is not remembered as the usual menace but, seen from the viewpoint of Yue, is viewed as a patriotic heroine. Her tale has been celebrated in literature by some of China's greatest writers including the poet Li Bai.

Xi Shi was taken to the Yue court and given education with Fan Li as her tutor, and also intensive training in court etiquette and the seductive arts. She and Fan Li fell in love. After three years she was considered ready. General Wen Zhong went to Wu with boatloads of magnificent gifts and asked the King of Wu whether he was interested in accepting this outstanding beauty. The King was, and sadly Xi Shi said goodbye to Fan Li and left to place her talents at the service of her state.

The King of Wu soon became completely infatuated with her. He spent all his days with her and created extravagant entertainment to please her. Xi Shi flattered him and encouraged him in this. She used her influence on him to undermine the position of the old minister Wu Zixu who opposed his relation with her, and to praise and promote Bo Pi, a minister who General Wen Zhong had bought over to Yue's side.

For her the King built Guanwa Palace (Palace of Beautiful Women) in an imperial park on the slope of Lingyan Hill, about 15 kilometres west of Suzhou. So elaborate was it, the story goes, that it had strings of real pearls to shade to windows. Next to it he built the promenade of Musical Shoes. Under the marble floor were thousands of earthenware jars which rang like chimes when she walked or danced on it.

For her he dug a special river. Along its banks were many pavilions where musician and dancers would perform. Xi Shi found that long excursions on it were a good way to keep him from government affairs for days at a time. The cost of such extravagances left the people most dissatisfied.

Xi Shi sent a secret message to Fan Li that Wu was weakening, and got one back urging her to use her influence to get rid of minister Wu Zixu. She waited her chance until one day in 484 B.C., in disapproval Wu Zixu refused to attend the ceremony to receive another shipment of gifts from Yue. The King of Wu was incensed at this affront to himself, but feared to punish him lest it disaffected others. Xi Shi persuaded him that he should execute the minister as a warning to others. The king gave Wu Zixu a sword and told him to kill himself.

Despite the minister's warnings, Fu Chai still thought the King of Yue was loyal to him.

In 482 B.C. While the King of Wu was away at a conference of rulers to discuss control of the central plain, Yue launched a surprise attack on Wu, inflicting heavy casualties. Nine years later Yue won a decisive victory. When the King of Yue decreed that Fu Chai be sent to lifelong exile so an island in the sea, the latter in shame cut his own throat.

The Loyalty of a Brother and Sister

One day in the year 397 B.C. the prime minister of the State of Han was tending to his official duties when a man rushed into the hall waving his arms and shouting, "I have an urgent message for the prime minister!" Before the guard could stop him he had reached the minister and stabbed him in the heart.

Then the assassin took the dagger, disfigured his own face, gouged out his eyes and slit his throat.

The Duke of Han offered a large reward to anyone who could tell who the assassin was. The corpse was publicly displayed, but after seven days no one had recognized it or could suggest any motive for the killing.

The news spread quickly to neighboring states. In the State of Wei, when a woman named Nie Ying heard it, she broke into tears. "That must be my brother Nie Zheng," she said to her husband. She bound her head with white silk in mourning and set out for Han. Arriving there the next day, she threw herself on the corpse and wailed. She was immediately arrested and questioned about the dead man. She had this tale to tell:

Nie Zheng, her brother, had gone to the State of Qi and earned a living as a butcher. There he was befriended by a man named Yan Zhonggzi, who helped him get his

business started, assisted him in supporting his mother, and provided a handsome dowry for Nie Ying when she married. Both brother and sister felt they owed Yan a lot.

Now it happened that in his younger days Yan Zhongzi had also befriended another man, the very Xia Lei who had become prime minister of Han. Yan had given a thousand ounces of gold to help him get a start in his career. Xia Lei had gradually won favor in Han, but after becoming prime minister he turned against his benefactor, slandered him and had him sent into exile. Xia Lei was widely known for this ungrateful act.

The patriotic people of the State of Han had another reason for hating Xia Lei. This was the period of the Warring States. The State of Qin to the west was in its ascendancy, having already annexed several small states, and was now trying to seize the other large states, including Han, Qi, and Nie Zheng's own State of Wei. The other states were trying to unite against Qin, but Xia Lei did all he could to sabotage this alliance and appease Qin.

Nie Zheng was shocked at the way the prime minister had treated Yan Zhongzi. He decided to avenge his friend. So as not to bring trouble to his mother, Nie Zheng waited until after she died, and then went up to assassinate Xia Lei.

"My brother and I are twins and look very much alike," said Nie Ying. "He was afraid that someone would recognize him and I would suffer. That was why he disfigured his face. But how can I let him, who performed such a heroic deed, lie unburied? I want the whole world to know of his devotion to his friend." After denouncing the prime minister she dashed her head against a stone pillar and killed herself.

The story of Nie Ying and her brother spread far and wide throughout Han and the neighboring states. People sympathised with them. The Duke of Han, too, was impressed by her bravery and ordered that she and her brother be given a proper burial together. Their story was later recorded in several ancient books, the historian Sime Qian's *Historical Records*, the *Strategy of the Warring States* and *Tales of Assassins*.

The Return of the Priceless Jade

"The King of Qin, which was the most powerful state during the Warring States period, learned that the King of the State of Zhao had acquired a priceless piece of carved jade. The Qin coveted the jade and in 283 B.C. sent an emissary to Zhao offering to trade 15 cities for it. The King of Zhao was reluctant. He knew that if he accepted the offer Qin would not really give up the cities. But if he refused, the powerful Qin armies would probably attack Zhao. Someone advised him to consult with Lin Xiangru on this dilemma.

Lin Xiangru, who came from a poor family, was a steward of one of the court eunuchs. Though not an important person, he was known to be brave and resourceful and a man of his word. He had also shown considerable ability as an envoy.

"If we refuse Qin out of hand," Lin Xiangru told his king, "it will make us look in the wrong. But if we give Qin the jade and its king does not hand over the cities, it will be they who are in the wrong and this will be to our advantage. Let me handle the matter."

When Lin Xiangru reached Qin, he ceremoniously presented the jade to the king, who was delighted with it. He looked at it this way and that and passes it about for his retainers and the court ladies for them to admire. Everyone congratulated him for having got such a good thing. However, in the joy and excitement, Lin Xiangru was ignored and nothing was said about the 15 cities. Finally Lin said to the king, "This is indeed a very good piece of jade, but it has a flaw. You will not be able to detect it unless you look at it carefully. Let me show it to you."

The king believed him and gave back the jade. As soon as he had it in his hands, Lin withdrew a few steps and took a stance beside a pillar. "I brought this jade because I thought your majesty would keep your promise," he said with a great show of anger. "But you have taken it without even a mention of the 15 cities. What kind of trick is this? Now I've got the jade. If you try to seize it, I will smash my head against this pillar and the jade with it."

Qin King immediately apologized and called for a map to point out the location of the 15 cities.

Lin Xiangru knew that the ruler still had no intention of relinquishing the cities, but he had another plan up his sleeve. Since early times jade had been revered for its power to impart virtue, and was used for ceremonial purposes. Lin Xiangru said, "Before I bought this jade here, the King of Zhao fasted for five days and held a solemn ceremony. I therefore hope that your majesty will do likewise before I present it to you." the Qin King promised to do so.

But that night Lin Xiangru had one of his men, disguised in rags, secretly take the jade back to Zhao. Not knowing this, after five days, the King of Qin held a grand ceremony for the formal reception of the jade.

At it, Lin Xiangru said to him sternly, "The State of Qin has had some 20 rulers and none of them were known for keeping their word. They all relied on power and oppressed the people. Considering that and my recent experience, I'm afraid of being tricked again so I have had the jade taken back to Zhao. If you turn over the 15 cities first, the King of Zhao



will certainly not refuse to give you the jade. As for myself, I am prepared to suffer the severest punishment."

The Qin king was furious, but he decided it would be unwise to kill Lin Xiangru, for if he did he might never get the jade and relations between the two states would be affected. Reluctantly he allowed Lin Xiangru to return to Zhao.

The King of Zhao was very pleased with Lin's feat and soon made him prime minister. Lin's promotion, however, was a source of great irritation to another minister, the renowned general Lian Po.

Now Lian Po was really a very upright man who had rendered outstanding service to his state, but he had one big shortcoming--he was vain and arrogant. He could not tolerate the fact that Lin Xiangru, from a poor family, should now hold a higher position than himself. He bad-mouthed Lin all over the place.

Lin tried to stay out of his way. At state meeting he deliberately avoided sitting on the same side as Lian Po so that it would not be too obvious that he took precedence in seating. One day when he was out in his chariot he saw Lian Po's chariot coming toward him along the narrow road. According to rank, Lian Po was supposed to pull over to let Lin pass. But Lin ordered his driver to pull into a small side lane so that Lian Po could go first.

Lin Xiangru's subordinates could not understand his attitudes toward Lian Po. "Do you think I'm afraid of him?" Lin said. "Was I afraid of the fierce King of Qin? I want to get along with Lian Po because we are both officials of Zhao. If we work together, Qin will not dare to bully us, but if we're at odds, it will be easier for Qin to invade us."

These words reached Lian Po's ears. He was deeply moved and regretted the way he had acted. To express his apology, he took off his shirt and went to see Lin Xiangru. On his bare back was a load of the prickly branches of the "chastisement tree" used for whipping people. Kneeling before Lin, Lian Po said that he should not have let a matter like personal fame and fortune turn him against Lin Xiangru. "I did not recognize your magnanimity and am heartily sorry for what I have done. You have every right to scold me and beat me."

Lin, too, went down on his knees. "You are very hard on yourself, general. Let us share the burdens of state together." They embraced and after that worked side-by-side to build up and defend their state, so for a long time Qin did not dare to invade Zhao.

Two Traveling Diplomats

The age of the breaking into separate states was the age of the traveling philosopher.

In the Spring and Autumn and Warring States period (722 to 221 B. C.) it was possible for a scholar from one state to go to another and achieve a high position. As the states were continually at war with each other, their rulers were eager to get new ideas. Some of these scholars genuinely sought to solve problems of the age, others have been called adventurers. Sometimes they had considerable influence on events. two of these scholars famed for their diplomatic activity in Warring States times were Su Qin and Zhang Yi.

This story reflects the conflict between the powerful State of Qin, which wanted to absorb the other six main states to the east (called the horizontal alliance) or to unite the other states to oppose Qin (the vertical alliance). Su Qin advocated the latter, and Zhang Yi the former and they were among those known as the "criss-cross philosophers.' Both were of humble origin and had been fellow-students under a well-known debater.

Su Qin originally had no intention opposing the State of Qin. Going there from his native home in Luoyang, he found that his particular ideas for helping Qin were not wanted there. He had to go back home in despair and rags, having spent all his resources.

"You'd have done better if you had become a merchant as I told you to," his mother complained, "but you insisted on getting an education and becoming an official. Now look what you've come to!" His wife sat before her loom weaving without lifting her head, as though they were strangers. Su Qin had to ask his sister-in-law to give him something to eat. "We don't even have firewood for cooking, to say nothing about food," she snapped.

Stung, Su Qin decided he'd have come up with a better political scheme. He spent the next two years making an intensive study of the political and military successes and failures of every state, often working right through the night, keeping awake by pricking himself with an awl till blood came. His conclusion was just the opposite of his former position: now he wanted to unite the six states against Qin.

He went to the state of Yan and convinced the King of Yan of the wisdom of his course and became the latter's special ambassador to the other states. When the alliance was formed in 333 B.C. with Su Qin as head, he was already Prime Minister of the State of Zhao. In order to make it effective, he was given the seal of the prime minister of each of the other states.

This time when he went back to Luoyang, the king of the defunct old Zhou dynasty still holding on there had the roads swept and sent a minister to greet him. His mother eagerly came down the street to welcome her now respectable and richly clad son. Because of her former attitude, his wife did not dare look him in the face. His sister-in-law knelt before him.

"Why do you show me so much respect?" he asked, feeling uncomfortable.

"Because you have a high position and money."

"It's money that counts, even with one's relatives," Su Qin sighed as he rode them home

in his chariot. He built a magnificent house for them and distributed the money he had brought with him among the poor and those who had once helped him.

Zhang Yi, too, had an inauspicious beginning. He had gone to the State of Chu, and was once a minor guest at a banquet. While the King of Chu(most of the dukes under the Zhou dynasty were now calling themselves kings) was showing his guests a priceless piece of jade he had acquired, there was a sudden downpour and in the confusion the jade disappeared. As the most humble and shabbily dressed among the guests, Zhang Yi was suspected. He was beaten black and blue to force him to confess he had taken the jade, but he still wouldn't admit it. He returned home battered and bruised. His wife wept, "If you hadn't become a scholar and pursued fame and honor, you'd never have got this beating. Now stay home after this." Zhang Yi opened his mouth wide and said, "Is my tongue still there?" Of course it was. "As long as I have my tongue to spread my ideas, I'll be able to make it.

When he recovered he sought out his former fellow-student Su Qin, hoping to get help. To his surprise, Su Qin treated him coldly. Su was entertaining guests when Zhang got there and kept him waiting in the corridor till noon. many extravagant courses were served, but Zhang Yi was given the food of the servants.

They finally got to talk and Su Qin said, "You have greater ability than I, it is only that I have been luckier. One word of recommendation from me could make you somebody. But if you don't live up to my expectations it will ruin my reputation." Offended, Zhang Yi stood up and left without a word. He decided to try his luck on the other side---in the State of Qin.

Su Qin later told one of his assistants in confidence that he had deliberately wanted to infuriate Zhang Yi and drive him over to the side of Qin so that he could make use of him over there. Su Qin sent his men secretly to Qin with a handsome sum to establish connections there for Zhang Yi. Thus Zhang Yi eventually became a trusted minister of the King of Qin.

Su Qin, however, was assassinated not long afterwards by a rival in the State of Qi. After his death Zhang Yi furthered his own plan by disrupting the unity of the other states and trying to win them over to Qin. Su's alliance had kept Qin away for a while, but in the tide of history it was Zhang Yi whose plan succeeded as Qin conquered the other states one after another.

The age of the breaking into separate states was the age of the traveling philosopher.

In the Spring and Autumn and Warring States period (722 to 221 B. C.) it was possible for a scholar from one state to go to another and achieve a high position. As the states were continually at war with each other, their rulers were eager to get new ideas. Some of these scholars genuinely sought to solve problems of the age, others have been called adventurers. Sometimes they had considerable influence on events. two of these scholars famed for their diplomatic activity in Warring States times were Su Qin and Zhang Yi.

This story reflects the conflict between the powerful State of Qin, which wanted to absorb the other six main states to the east (called the horizontal alliance) or to unite the other states to oppose Qin (the vertical alliance). Su Qin advocated the latter, and Zhang Yi the former and they were among those known as the "criss-cross philosophers.' Both were of humble origin and had been fellow-students under a well-known debater.

Su Qin originally had no intention opposing the State of Qin. Going there from his native home in Luoyang, he found that his particular ideas for helping Qin were not wanted there. He had to go back home in despair and rags, having spent all his resources.

"You'd have done better if you had become a merchant as I told you to," his mother complained, "but you insisted on getting an education and becoming an official. Now look what you've come to!" His wife sat before her loom weaving without lifting her head, as though they were strangers. Su Qin had to ask his sister-in-law to give him something to eat. "We don't even have firewood for cooking, to say nothing about food," she snapped.

Stung, Su Qin decided he'd have come up with a better political scheme. He spent the next two years making an intensive study of the political and military successes and failures of every state, often working right through the night, keeping awake by pricking himself with an awl till blood came. His conclusion was just the opposite of his former position: now he wanted to unite the six states against Qin.

He went to the state of Yan and convinced the King of Yan of the wisdom of his course and became the latter's special ambassador to the other states. When the alliance was formed in 333 B.C. with Su Qin as head, he was already Prime Minister of the State of Zhao. In order to make it effective, he was given the seal of the prime minister of each of the other states.

This time when he went back to Luoyang, the king of the defunct old Zhou dynasty still holding on there had the roads swept and sent a minister to greet him. His mother eagerly came down the street to welcome her now respectable and richly clad son. Because of her former attitude, his wife did not dare look him in the face. His sister-in-law knelt before him.

"Why do you show me so much respect?" he asked, feeling uncomfortable.

"Because you have a high position and money."

"It's money that counts, even with one's relatives," Su Qin sighed as he rode them home in his chariot. He built a magnificent house for them and distributed the money he had brought with him among the poor and those who had once helped him.

Zhang Yi, too, had an inauspicious beginning. He had gone to the State of Chu, and was once a minor guest at a banquet. While the King of Chu(most of the dukes under the Zhou dynasty were now calling themselves kings) was showing his guests a priceless piece of jade he had acquired, there was a sudden downpour and in the confusion the jade

disappeared. As the most humble and shabbily dressed among the guests, Zhang Yi was suspected. He was beaten black and blue to force him to confess he had taken the jade, but he still wouldn't admit it. He returned home battered and bruised. His wife wept, "If you hadn't become a scholar and pursued fame and honor, you'd never have got this beating. Now stay home after this." Zhang Yi opened his mouth wide and said, "Is my tongue still there?" Of course it was. "As long as I have my tongue to spread my ideas, I'll be able to make it.

When he recovered he sought out his former fellow-student Su Qin, hoping to get help. To his surprise, Su Qin treated him coldly. Su was entertaining guests when Zhang got there and kept him waiting in the corridor till noon. many extravagant courses were served, but Zhang Yi was given the food of the servants.

They finally got to talk and Su Qin said, "You have greater ability than I, it is only that I have been luckier. One word of recommendation from me could make you somebody. But if you don't live up to my expectations it will ruin my reputation." Offended, Zhang Yi stood up and left without a word. He decided to try his luck on the other side---in the State of Qin.

Su Qin later told one of his assistants in confidence that he had deliberately wanted to infuriate Zhang Yi and drive him over to the side of Qin so that he could make use of him over there. Su Qin sent his men secretly to Qin with a handsome sum to establish connections there for Zhang Yi. Thus Zhang Yi eventually became a trusted minister of the King of Qin.

Su Qin, however, was assassinated not long afterwards by a rival in the State of Qi. After his death Zhang Yi furthered his own plan by disrupting the unity of the other states and trying to win them over to Qin. Su's alliance had kept Qin away for a while, but in the tide of history it was Zhang Yi whose plan succeeded as Qin conquered the other states one after another.

Jing Ke and The King of Qin

As the Warring States period drew to a close, Ying Zheng, King of the State of Qin, later known the Emperor Qin Shi Huang, pursued with greater verve the program of conquest by which he was to bring all the states under his rule in 221 B.C. By 227 B.C. Qin had conquered the states of Han and Zhao and was threatening the State of Yan to the northeast along the coast.

Prince Dan, son of the King of Yan, didn't think he had much chance of defending his state, so he decided the best thing to do was to get someone to assassinate Ying Zheng. In fact, he had a special grudge against the King of Qin for he had been captured and held prisoner in Qin for five years before he escaped.

About this time Prince Dan found a new crony. He was Jing Ke, an adventurer from the State of Wei who in his wanderings had come to Yan. There he mingled with the common people, was always ready to help, and soon gained a good reputation. He and the prince took to each other from their first meeting. The prince decided that Jing Ke was the very person to accomplish his end. Courting Jing Ke's favor, the prince had a luxurious palace built for him and the best food sent to him. He visited Jing Ke nearly every day and made his favorite chariot available to him.



One day while the two of them were admiring the fish in a pond, a big turtle surfaced. Jing Ke picked up a pebble and threw it at the turtle. So Prince Dan had some gold pellets made just for Jing Ke to throw at turtles.

Another time when they were out hunting Jing Ke happened to remark on what a tasty dish horse liver was. The prince had his best horse slaughtered and the liver cooked for Jing Ke. All this made a big impression on Jing Ke, He felt he would be willing to do anything for the prince.

Qin troops were massing along Yan's southern border. Prince Dan called Jing Ke in and told him of his hope for saving Yan by killing the King of Qin.

"I've been thinking about that," said Jing Ke. "The problem is to get access to the king." He asked for two things: One was a map of the Dukang district(just southwest of the present Beijing capital district), the most fertile part of Yan, which the King of Qin longed to possess. The other: the head of a man named Yan Yuqi, who had defected from Qin to Yan and was on Qin's wanted list. "If I offer these to the Qin King, he will certainly meet me personally and then I'll have the chance to assassinate him. "said Jing Ke.

While the prince prepared a map of Dukang, Jing Ke went to Fan Yuqi's home and told him of the assassination plot. He convinced Fan that giving up his head would be a great service to Yan and afford him a chance to avenge himself against Qin. Fan cut his own throat and Jing Ke took his head. The prince gave Jing Ke a dagger with a poisoned blade and assigned another well-known bravo, Qin Wuyang, to accompany him.

The two arrived in the state of Qin and soon gained an audience with the king. But when they got in Jing Ke's companion lost his nerve. His hands started tremble. This aroused the king's suspicion but Jing Ke explained that this was because he was overawed in the royal presence.

Carrying a wooden box containing the head, and the map scroll with the poisoned dagger rolled up inside it, Jing Ke approached the king. When he unrolled the map, the dagger

was revealed. As the king stepped back, Jing Ke leaped at him, grabbed him by the sleeve and pointed the dagger at him. the king jerked away and the dagger only tore his sleeve.

The king leaped behind a pillar with Jing Ke after him, Long in fear of his life, the king had ordered that no one could enter the throne room with a weapon, so his retainers were all unarmed. But the king's personal physician tried to get between them with his bag of medicine, and this gave the king a moment's respite. The king pulled out his sword and severed Jing Ke's left leg. With a last desperate fling, Jing Ke threw the dagger at the king, but he missed. The guards rushed in from outside and killed Jing Ke and his accomplice, and the plot came to naught.

From this story in Chinese history comes a well-known figure of speech: "When the map is rolled, the dagger is revealed," meaning that a person's evil intentions are finally exposed. After the incident Qin's forces drove down on Yan. Reaching its capital next year, Ying Zheng forced the King of Yan to have his own son Prince Dan put to death. By 222 B.C. the State of Yan had been completely wiped out by the State of Qin.

Qu Yuan, the Patriotic Poet

The misfortunes Qu Yuan (c. 340-278 B.C.) suffered drove him to take his own life, but also moved him to write some of the most beautiful poetry in the Chinese language. For his devotion to his State of Chu during the Warring States period, at later junctures in history Qu Yuan has often been recalled as a model of patriotism.

The State of Qin in the west was bent on annexing the other states, including Qu Yuan's Chu in the Changjiang (Yangtze) River valley to the south. Holding the office of "left ministry", second only to the prime minister, the nobleman Qu Yuan urged that the Chu, to resist Qin, ally with the State of Qi to the east. This was opposed by Zhangyi, a minister of the State of Qin who was trying to disrupt any anti-Qin alliances (see "Two Traveling Diplomats"). He seized upon an incident with a jealous court official in Chu to get rid of Qu Yuan.

Qu Yuan had refused to let Jin Sheng, the chief minister to the King of Chu, have look at a rough draft of a decree he had been asked to draw up. In anger Jin spread the rumor that Qu Yuan was leaking state secrets. He said that Qu Yuan had boasted that without his aid no decree could be drafted. This made the King of Chu feel that Qu Yuan was belittling him.

When the story of the incident in Chu reached the ears of Zhang Yi in Qin, he secretly sent a large amount of gold, silver and jewels to Chu to bribe Jin Sheng and the king's favorite concubine to form an anti-Qu Yuan clique. The result was that the king banished Qu Yuan from the capital in 313B.C.

The next year, as relations between Qin and Chu worsened, Qu Yuan was called back and named to a high office , but the clique continued its machinations against him.

In 299 B.C. after several unsuccessful forays against Chu, Qin invited the King of Chu over, ostensibly for talks. Qu Yuan feared this was a trap and urged his king not to go. The latter would not listen and he even blamed Qu Yuan for interfering.

On the way, the King of Chu was seized by Qin troops. He died in captivity three years later. Chu came under the rule of the king' eldest son, later known as King Qing Xiang. Under him the state administration deteriorated.

Qu Yuan hoped to institute reforms and in poems satirized the corruption, selfishness and disregard for the people on the part of dubious characters who had achieved trusted positions. Neither this nor Qu Yuan's resolve to resist Qin set well with King Qing Xiang , who was in fact married to a daughter of the King of Qin, In 296 B. C. Qu Yuan, then in his mid50s, was banish for the second time. Grieving for the condition of his homeland, for years he wandered about south of the Changjiang.

During this time he poured out his feeling of grief and concern for his state in the allegorical Li Sao, a long autobiographical poem in which he tells of his political ideal and the corruption and mismanagement of the court.

There is a story of how an old fisherman met Qu Yuan, haggard and distraught, wailing beside the Canglang River in Hubei province. When the fisherman asked Qu Yuan how he had come to this , he replied, " The world is foul and I alone am clean . They all are drunk and I alone am sober. So I was banished."

" The true sage does not quarrel with his surroundings , but adjusts to them," the fisherman said. " If the world is foul, why not leap into the side and make it clean? If all men are drunk, why not drink with them, Why should you be so virtuous as to get yourself banished?"

He rowed away singing a song:" When the water of the Canglang is clean and clear, in it I wash my headgear. When it is filthy more than met, I use it to wash my feet. " But Qu Yuan was unable to do this.

In 280 B.C. Qin launched an overall invasion of Chu and in 278 B.C. captured the capital. This news reached Qu Yuan while he was near the Miluo River in northeastern Hunan province. In frustration at being unable to do anything to save his state, he clasped a big stone to his breast and leaped into the river to end his life.

Qu Yuan's sufferings had gained the sympathy of the people of Chu. In memory of him, every year on the fifth day of the fifth month of the lunar calendar, the day he drowned himself, dragon boat races, which are said to represent the search for his body, are still held, and the Chinese people eat zongzi, little packets of glutinous rice wrapped in bamboo leaves, thought to have their origin in the bamboo leaves, thought to have their

origin in the bamboo tubes of rice thrown into the river as food for his spirit . Originally, to keep the river dragons from eating them, the packets were tied with colored silk threads which dragons fear.

A biography of Qu Yuan is included in Sima Qian's Historical Records. In recent times, the story of Qu Yuan was adapted by the poet Guo Moruo in a 1942 play of the same name, which he made a vehicle to express the feeling of the people against Chiang Kai-shek's reactionary rule.

Meng Jiangnv: Her Wails Split the Great Wall

Most enduring of the many legends about the Great Wall is the story of Meng Jiangnu, whose wails toppled it.

After he had finished conquering the six other states and had brought the country under one rule in 221 B.C., Qin Shi Huang, the First Emperor, was concerned about raids by the Xiongnu, a nomadic people to the north. The previous states had built many sections of defended wall to keep them out. The First Emperor launched a grandiose project of linking them into one, which became known as the Great Wall.

He sent one of his generals north with 500,000 laborers. Among those conscripted for the task was Meng Jiangnu's husband Wan Xiliang. There are different versions as to how he became her husband. She had been raised by a family other than her own, so bore two surnames, and was known as "the Meng-Jiang girl." One version has it that he was chosen from among numerous candidates by both families; another, that one day while she was in the garden, a man trying to escape from the pressgang labor leaped over the wall and landed at her feet. Her family harbored him, and they fell in love and married.

On the night of their wedding, Wan Xiliang was seized by the court officials. Before they parted, Meng took a hairpin of white jade from her head and broke it in two. She gave half to Wan Xiliang with the words."My heart is as white and pure as this jade. Keep this half and you will feel that I am with you."

Tales of the toll the wall was taking had reached her native place. The pace was brutal and the overseers merciless. Thousands upon thousands of laborers died of overwork and maltreatment. Ancient books were later to record that "the ditches were filled with corpses," and that "piled-up skeletons supported one another."

Nothing was heard of Wan Xiliang after he left. When autumn came and the birds began to fly south, Meng Jiangnu recalled that when he left he had been wearing only thin

clothing. She made him some padded clothes, bade her parents goodbye and left in search of her husband.

One day, hungry and exhausted, she fainted by the roadside. When she came to life she found that she was lying on a comfortably heated *kang* brick bed and a white-haired old woman was attending her. Meng was very eager to get on with her journey, and the old woman accompanied her. After three days and nights, Meng Jiangnu decided to say goodbye to her and thank her for her kindness, but when she turned to her the old woman had disappeared. The legend suggests that she was an immortal who, moved by Meng's devotion, had assumed a disguise to care for her.

Once Meng Jiangnu got lost and was wandering around in the mountains. Then she heard a flock of wild geese that seemed to be beckoning her. She followed them and finally reached the Great Wall.

There she saw the workers dressed in rags and reduced to skin and bones. Was her husband, too, like this? She mounted a guard platform high above the wall and shouted until her voice was hoarse, but found no sign of her husband.

Death of the First Emperor

In July of 210 B.C. a grand procession started out from Pingxiang (in today's Hebei province) and began moving slowly toward Xianyang, the capital city north of today's Xi'an. It was a royal entourage, accompanied by eunuchs and guarded by many soldiers.

The center of all this pomp was an elaborate closed chariot. Court retainers periodically took food to it and brought back orders. But the chariot's sole occupant would never eat or issue orders again -- it was the body of Emperor Qin Shi Huang, who had been ill and had died. The ruse was part of a plot by high officials to delay discovery of his death so that they could take power.

Qin Shi Huang is widely known today for the giant pottery army created by his order, excavated in the 1970s in the vicinity of his tomb near Xi'an in Shaanxi province.

Historians recognize the extraordinary achievements of his 37-year reign. Succeeding his father as king of the State of Qin at the age of 13, he became in 221 B.C. the first great unifier of China by conquering and bringing under one rule the seven major states which had been fighting for hegemony for two and a half centuries. He built the Great Wall (by joining a number of smaller local walls), unified the currency and the system of writing and weights and measures.

But Qin Shi Huang's contemporaries came to hate him as a tyrant. In his last days he became secretive and suspicious, fearing assassination and searching for an elixir of

immortality. He had reason to fear. His enemies included those who resented his conquest of the other states and the families of the tens of thousands who had suffered and died working in labor gangs on the Great Wall and other grandiose projects.

His rule was also noted for the burning of the books and the burying of scholars. The emperor ordered these actions at the instigation of his prime minister, Li Si, who thus sought to silence opposition to centralized rule. In 213 B.C., throughout the states, all histories and writings other than the official Qin history and books on topics such as medicine and agriculture were collected and burned, though copies were securely locked up in the imperial library.

Confucian scholars had been particularly active in opposing the emperor, using quotations from the classics. A year after the book-burying, the scholars themselves were rounded up, along with alchemists and makers of immortality pills, whose ineffectiveness had displeased the emperor. Some 400 persons were buried alive as a lesson to any who thought of speaking out against the regime. When the emperor's eldest son Fu Su objected, he was banished to a border region.

Hence many had reason to hope for the end of this cruel emperor. One legend has it that the autumn before his death one of his attendants encountered an old man with a piece of white jade in his hand (signifying that he had immortal connections). The old man had a message for Qin Shi Huang: The Primal Dragon will die this year.

Others took more direct measures. One of those making an attempt on his life was Zhang Liang, from a noble family in the former State of Han (he later became an influential counselor in the Western Han dynasty, founded in 206 B.C.). Zhang enlisted a man of extraordinary strength to make a heavy iron hammer and strike the emperor with it while he was on tour near Kaifeng in Henan province. The attack failed, and an imperial retainer was killed instead.

In his last years, the fearful emperor forbade anyone to mention the word death in his presence. Around his capital Xian yang he is said to have built 270 small palaces, many connected by covered passages and bridges. He moved from one to the other in secrecy, and no one was permitted to reveal where he was on penalty of execution.

One "security leak" brought harsh punishment. Seeing the retinue of Prime Minister Li Si on the road one day, the emperor commented on its size. Li Si got word of this through one of the emperor's eunuchs and immediately cut the number of his attendants. When the emperor heard of it he was furious--undoubtedly someone had repeated his words, and he hated the idea. When no one would confess, he ordered everyone who had been with him on that fateful day killed.

A year before his death, a meteorite fell near Puyang in today's Henan province. On it someone carved seven big characters implying that after the conqueror's death the country would revert to separate states. Again, when no one in the district would admit the deed, he had all those questioned executed.

The secrecy and plotting that characterized his final years followed his body on its last long journey from Pingxiang to Xianyang. The weather was hot and the body began to decompose; baskets of fish were placed around it to hide around it to hide the smell. The only ones who knew of his death were Prime Minister Li Si, the emperor's second son Hu Hai, the powerful court eunuch Zhao and a few others. In part they feared an uprising in the former independent states, but they also wanted to further their own ends.

They destroyed a letter the emperor had written to his eldest son telling his to return to the capital, and instead forged documents charging Fu Su (and his ally general Meng Tian, who had supervised work on the Great Wall) with a serious crime and ordering their deaths. At the same time they forged a decree making Hu Hai successor to the throne.

When the party reached Xianyang, the death of the emperor was announced and Hu Hai was crowned Second Emperor. In the ninth month the First Emperor was buried in the magnificent tomb on Mt. Lishan which he had built for himself by 710,000 conscript laborers.

The tomb was an underground palace and, according to the Historical Records of the later historian Sima Qian, included a banquet hall for a hundred officials. In the center of the tomb chamber was a model of the topography of China. The rivers reproduced in mercury by some mechanical means ere made to flow into the ocean. In them were waterfowl made of gold and silver. The ceiling reproduced the heavens with pearls set in as the sun, moon and stars. The tomb was filled with models of palaces and pavilions, precious stones and other rarities. In it burned lamps of salamander oil, thought to provide illumination for the longest possible time.

Hidden bows and arrows had been installed which would be triggered off automatically and kill anyone who disturbed the objects. Someone pointed out that the artisans and laborers who made the tomb might reveal what treasure was in it, so after the burial the gates were closed, imprisoning them inside. Hu Huai also ordered that the palace women who had not given birth to boys be shut in the tomb. Trees and grass were planted over the mausoleum to make it look like a hill.

Though adjuncts to it have been excavated, the tomb has not. It is doubtful whether all the fine things in it remain, for despite the elaborate precautions, it is generally believed to have been robbed.

It was Qin Shi Huang's hope that his dynasty would be carried on for thousands of years. Actually it lasted for only two generations. It was overthrown by a peasant rebellion begun in 209 B.C. by Chen Sheng and Wu Guang, two conscripts for the Great Wall.

Xiao He Pursues Han Xin by the Moonlight

The tale of Xiao He pursuing Han Xin in the moonlight has been used through the ages to stress the idea of appointing capable persons to official positions.

In his youth Han Xin didn't give much indication of competence. A poor commoner, he could get no one to recommend him as an official, and he was unable to make a living as a merchant. So he relied constantly on the generosity of others. He moved in with the family of the head of the imperial courier station in his home town, Huaiyin (now in Jiangsu province). But after several months the station head's wife let him know he wasn't wanted and he left.

He tried living on fish he caught in the river. An old woman who came there to wash and bleach silk took pity on him and fed him for many days until her bleaching was finished. Han Xin was most grateful. "I promise to repay you handsomely," he said. The old woman became angry. "Young man, I gave you food because I felt sorry for you, not because I expected repayment."

Han Xin's situation made him game for the bullies in his village. One of them, a butcher, accosted him in the marketplace. "You may be tall and like to carry a sword, but at heart you're nothing but a coward," he taunted. "If you have courage then why don't you kill me? If you haven't, then I demand that you crawl between my legs," he said as he spread his feet. Han Xin glared at the man for a long time. He apparently decided he had greater aspirations than to lose his life in such a brawl so he bent down and crept between the man's legs--to the amusement of everyone.

At this time a peasant uprising was threatening the Qin dynasty. When one of the rebel armies reached his home place Han Xin joined it, but failed to distinguish himself. After it was defeated he became a guardsman to Xiang Yu, an aristocrat from the former State of Chu. A rebel army led by him was contending with one led by Liu Bang, a pretty official from a peasant family who had gained the title the prince of Han, for territory formerly controlled by the Qin army. Liu Bang had defeated it in 207 B.C.

Han Xin made several suggestions on strategy to Xiang Yu, but the latter didn't pay any attention to him. So Han Xin left and went over to Liu Bang's forces in the west. He didn't cut much of a figure there either, for Liu Bang gave him only a lowly position as an official who received guests.

It was through becoming involved in a political scandal and sentenced to be beheaded that Han Xin finally attracted the attention of some important people. One was Xiao He, leading advisor to Liu Bang. Thirteen men had been beheaded before him and his turn was next. Seeing some important personages in the audience, he shouted, "Doesn't our prince want to conquer the empire? Then Why behead a brave man?" He was released and Liu Bang made him a middle-ranking official in charge of army grain, but still did not seem to appreciate his worth.

One person who did, however, was the advisor Xiao He. In several talks with Han Xin he came to feel that he had good ideas on strategy. Xiao He recommended him to Liu Bang said.

Han Xin became depressed, feeling that he would never be recognized. When, on a march, several dozens of Liu Bang's generals deserted, Han too left without notice early one morning. Xiao He, informed of it, felt this was a great loss and decided to go after him. He rode and rode till the moon came up. Finally he caught up with Han Xin on the banks of a river. Tired and breathless, he pleaded with Han Xin to return with him and Han Xin did.

On learning that his closest advisor had disappeared, Liu Bang was very irritated. When Xiao He came back, he said, " Why did you leave without telling me?" " I had no intention of leaving you, " replied Xiao He. " I was after a rare treasure and I pursued it for the defense of your rule. Han Xin would make a commander unparalleled in your whole army. If you want to march east and master the empire, Han Xin can be of great value to you. But if you don not use him properly he will leave again."

Liu Bang agreed to make Han Xin a general just to please Xiao He, but that was not enough for Xiao He. He insisted that Han Xin be made chief Marshall. Liu Bang finally agreed and prepared to call Han Xin in.

" That's just the trouble with." Xiao He said. " You are too offhand about these things, appointing a chief marshal as if you were calling for a child." He urged that the investiture be done with ceremony after fasting and purification.

Xiao He chose an auspicious day, an altar was built, and to the roll of drums Han Xin was presented with the seal and certificate giving him power over the army.

Afterward Liu Bang asked Han Xin for his ideas. Having formerly served Xiang Yu, Han Xin pointed out some of his weaknesses. Xiang Yu, he said, had a reputation for courage and magnanimity, but all this amounted to nothing, for he was incapable of employing wise generals; when someone did render service he hesitated to compensate him with a fief, " playing with the seal until the corners were rubbed smooth before he could bring himself to part with it. " Instead he awarded his favorites. With this he was sowing the seeds of his destruction. This is related by the historian Sima Qian, who wrote from the viewpoint of the Han dynasty which was established by Liu Bang.

Liu Bang got the message. With Han Xin's help, he built an army of high combat effectiveness and gradually established his rule over the whole country as first emperor of the Han dynasty. There are several tales of the military strategies by which Han Xin distinguished himself, and when his armies came back to Huaiyin, he did reward the old washerwoman. He accepted the title Marquis of Huaiyin and he and Xiao He, who became prime minister, were two of the three outstanding personalities of the early days of the Han dynasty (206 B.C. -A.D. 24).

The story of Xiao He's pursuit of him was made into an opera in the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368) which has remained popular to his day.

The Rise and Fall of Xiang Yu

The story of the brilliant and complicated character Xiang Yu(232-202 B.C.)--his meteoric rise from a man with "no inch of territory" to a great conqueror, his rivalry with and defeat by Liu Bang, founder of the Han dynasty in 206 B.C.--makes fascinating reading in the Historical Records of the Han Dynasty historian Sima Qian. The sketch tells of his arrogant, impetuous character which led to his demise.

Xiang Yu was from a noble family in the former State of Chu which had ceased to exist when Qin Shi Huang, the First Emperor, unified the country. While a peasant rebellion led by Chen Sheng and Wu Guang was assailing Qin rule, Xiang Yu killed the perfect of Wu(the present-day Xuzhou in Jiangsu Province) and organized troops to join the uprising.



About this same time, Liu Bang, a petty official in the Qin apparatus who had come from a peasant family, led an uprising in today's Jiangsu province. After the two leaders of the peasant rebellion were killed, armies led by Xiang Yu and Liu Bang became the main forces battling to overthrow Qin. The two fought together for a time under the banner of King Huai of Chu, the former King of the Chu's grandson who had been found herding sheep and set up as emperor.

In 208 B.C. while Xiang Yu and Liu Bang were making plans to capture the Qin capital Xianyang, an urgent call for aid came from the city of Julu, which had been under siege for nearly a month by Qin troops. A large army was sent to relieve Julu with Xiang Yu as second in command under the veteran statesman Song Yi.

When the troops got to Anyang Song Yi ordered them to stop. He wanted to wait till the Qin army wore itself out taking the city and then to attack. They stayed there 46 days in cold wet weather and the troops were short of food. Xiang Yu wanted to go ahead. He didn't feel they'd gain any military advantage and was furious with Song Yi for ignoring the suffering of the soldiers.

One morning during a conference with Song Yi, Xiang Yu jumped up and killed him. The generals were awed into submission and elected him their leader.

A portion of Xiang Yu's army failed to raise the siege, so he sent his entire force into battle. When they had crossed the Zhang River he ordered all the boats sunk and, after a three-day supply of food had been prepared, all cooking pots smashed, giving his troops no choice but to go forward. Still today, "smash pots and sink boats" is an idiom in Chinese.

After Xiang Yu's troops had raised the siege and the Qin general had surrendered to him, he went on to conquer a vast territory covering five former states. He also carved up the Qin empire in fiefs to his supporters and, giving himself the title of Overlord of Conqueror, banished King Huai of Chu.

In the meantime, Liu Bang, with fewer forces, fought his way westward through Hangu Pass to take the Qin capital, thereby also gaining a claim to be emperor. This was followed by four years of fighting between him and Xiang Yu, complicated by the fact that the latter, homesick for Chu, had made the tactical error of withdrawing from territory west of the pass.

By the end of 203 B.C. many of the lesser kings and barons had deserted Xiang Yu. One night, surrounded by Liu Bang's forces and low on supplies, he was sitting in his tent with his favorite concubine Lay Yu when he heard the sound of songs from Chu, his own homeland, coming from the besiegers. "Can it be true that Han has conquered Chu, that they have so many men of Chu with them?" he asked. With this, another phrase entered the Chinese language: "Chu songs on four sides," meaning to be besieged from all sides. Overwhelmed with sadness, Xiang Yu sat late into the night drinking with the lady Yu and

singing a melancholy song to his own words:
 My strength uprooted mountains,
 My spirit overstepped the world;
 But the times are against me,
 And my horse can gallop no more.
 When he can gallop on more
 What can I do?
 And what is to become of Lady Yu.



He sang it over and over again till tears ran down his retainers' cheeks. Then he rushed out of the tent and with the 800 men left with him dashed through the lines till he reached the Wujiang River. Heaven was against him, he said, it was of no use to cross the river. Among his attackers he met an old friend. He offered him his head, on which there was a high price, and cut him his head.

The Chinese traditional opera Xiang Yu the Conqueror Bids Farewell to his Concubine is based on this incident. There is no record of what happened to Lady Yu. One legend has

it that after him, she sang a song which echoed the line about Chu songs and killed herself.

Su Wu, Lonely Shepherd of the North

An ancient folk song sung to this day is one about Su Wu. It runs:

Su Wu by the Huns detained,
His integrity maintained.

Sent as an emissary of Emperor Han Wu Di to the northern nomads the Xiongnu(Huns), Su Wu was held by them, but despite great privation refused to go over to their side to free himself.

For more than a century the Xiongnu has been growing stronger and troubling the border lands under Han dynasty rule. His specific mission was to solve the problem of indiscriminate detention of envoys by both sides, which had been going on for some time. He was from a military family which had distinguished itself I fighting the Xiongnu, and the History of the Han Dynasty , which tells his story, ascribes the origin of his indomitable will to his early strict education.

In 100 B.C. Su Wu set out with a subordinate named Zhang Sheng and some hundred retainers bearing birth gifts for the Chanyu, or Xiongnu Khan. He expected to fulfill his mission successfully and remove the misunderstandings which had accumulated over the years.

When he reached the north he found that the situations not what he had expected. The Chanyu was overbearing and suspicious. Things got even more complicated when Zhang Sheng became implicated in a plot against the Xiongnu leaders.

Previously a Han dynasty man named Yu Chang had gone over to the good graces of Han. He got together 700 men and plotted to kidnap the Chanyu's mother to impress the Han delegation. He told his plan to Zhang Sheng, who supported the idea. It was an abortive effort and led to Yu Chang's arrest.since the plot took place at the same time as Su Wu's visit, the Changyu naturally suspected that he was behind it.

When Zhang Sheng went to Su Wu and told him of the situation, Su Wu was aghast, "For the envoy of the Han emperor to be interrogated would be the grossest insult to Han," he said. In order to prevent it from happening he would have killed himself right then and there had not one of his attendants snatched his sword from him.

The Changyu ordered Su Wu and his men put on trial and Su Wu made a second attempt on his own life. The Changyu really believed that Su Wu was implicated in the plot and wanted to force him to confess. But he realized that here was an indomitable will that had to be broken. In the meantime, Yu Chang was sentenced to death and executed

immediately. Then the Xiongnu went to work on Zhang Sheng, who was a spineless person and admitted to guilt even though in fact he had not had anything directly to do with the plot.

Su Wu was different. "What guilt do I have?" he replied. He would not confess even to save his life, for he knew it would have disastrous consequences for relations between Han and the Xiongnu. The Xiongnu realized that no threat of death could scare him. So they tried to buy him over with the offer of a high position and handsome income. All they got in return were reproaches from Su Wu.

Thus Su Wu ended up spending four days and nights in a cold damp cave without food or water. It was midwinter and the cold was terrible. The lack of food and water was beginning to weaken him, so he ate snow to quench his thirst and chewed on a piece of his felt blanket to appease his hunger. Surprised at his strong power of survival, the Xiongnu thought he must be protected by a god.

Finally they sent Su Wu off the herd sheep on shores of the "northern sea". Indication some rams, the Chanyu said, "You will be allowed to return to the land of Han only when these bear lambs," meaning never--unless he would come over to the side of the Huns.

Su Wu faced this new test with dignity. He asked for his staff of office, made of bamboo with tassels of yak hair, the symbol of his authority as a representative of Han, and carrying it he departed with his sheep in the direction of Lake Baikal.

He spent nineteen hard years in that cold, uninhabited place. There was not enough to eat, and in winter he had to kill rats for food. But no matter how hard life was, he never for one day forgot that he was the emissary of Han. The tassels wore out and fell off, but Su Wu always kept the staff of office with him.

In 81 B.C. peace was made between Han and the Xiongnu and normal relations were established. An envoy of Han was sent to the Xiongnu to bring Su Wu back. The Xiongnu, afraid to reveal the truth, told him that Su Wu had died long before. The Han envoy said, "One day the emperor went hunting and shot a wild goose that flew down from the north. On its leg was a message written by Su Wu tied with a piece of silk. This proves he is still alive." The Xiongnu leader then ordered his men to bring Su Wu back.

Su Wu was by now over sixty and his hair had turned completely white. Still holding the staff, he returned to the palace in Chang'an and was received by Emperor Hao Zhao Zong. He was given a position as a high-ranking official in charge of border peoples and vassal states. After his death his portrait was hung in the palace in history to preserve his memory forever.

Wang Zhaojun: one of the four greatest beauties

In the popular mind Wang Zhaojun has always been a tragic figure: a Han dynasty court lady married off a Chanyu (Khan) of the Xiongnu(Huns) who left her hom eand died in far north. Perhaps this is because in history a number of such women were so married in the interests of diplomacy. Wang Zhaojun, despite the persistence of the counter-legend, was the exception: she chose her life.

Wang Zhaojun was a real person, born Wang Qiang in Zigui county, Hubei province. This much is in the official records, for ijn her teens she entered the palace as one of the numerous candidatesss from whom Emperor Yuan Di chose his concubines, said to number in the thousands.

Verses by the Eastern Han dynasty poet Cai Yong (132-192) picture her as a daring and determined young woman who entered the court willingly to save her father, a scholar- official, from persecution. The most romantic tale about her comes from the Jin dynasty writer Ge Hong (284-364). She was beautiful, intelligent and well-0read. Si sure was she of her beauty---or perhaps so straightforward --- that she refused to bribe the court painter Mao Yanshou as the others did when he did portraits of teh candidates for the emperor to choose from. As a result he painted an unflattering picture and she was passed over by the emperor. She did not like the thought of wasting her life in court, and hoped that some day something would happen that would free her from it.

In the year 33 B.C. the Xiongnus, a nomadic people to the north, wanted to establish friendly relations with the Han dynasty. The Chanyu came to the Han capital Chang'an and requested a Han princess as a bride, a way of cementing relations frequently used in those days. Instead, Han Emperor Yuan Di said he would send one of his imperial concubine candidates, and give her away like his own daughter. He asked for volunteers. The idea of leaving their homeland and comfortable life at the court for the grasslands of the far and unknown north was abhorrent to most of the young women. But not to Wang Zhaojun: She saw it as a chance to leave the empty palace life and possibly play a more important role than she ever would in Chang'an. She applied.
