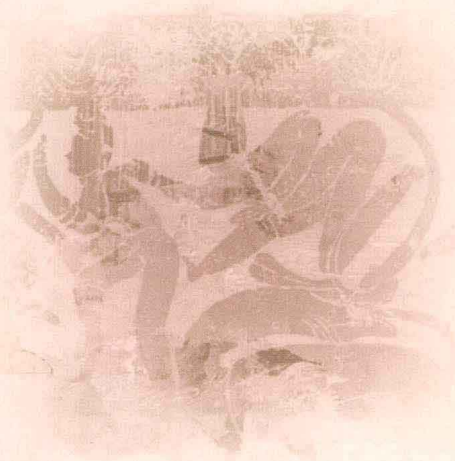




中國古典智慧

Stories of Chinese Wisdom

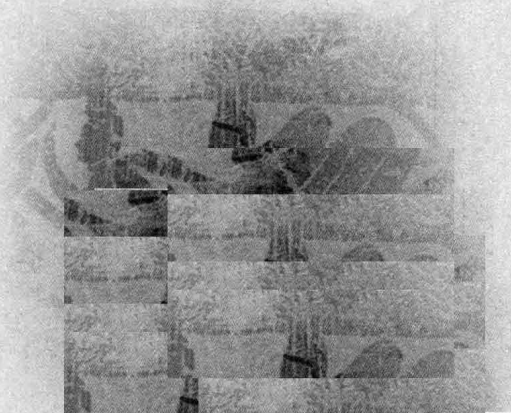


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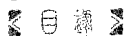


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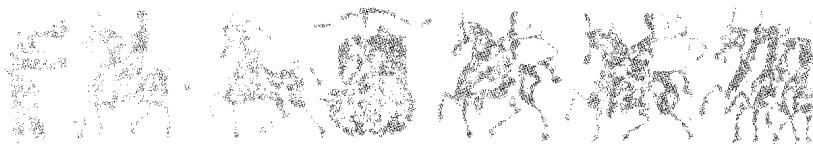
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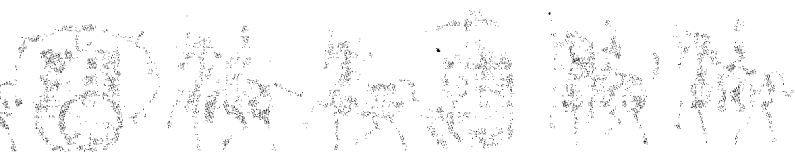
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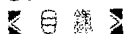
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中國古樂圖



C H I N E S E W I S D O M



Lips and Teeth

Near the powerful State of Jin there were two small and weak states - Yu and Guo. Duke Xian, the ruler of Jin, decided to attack these poor neighbors. He ordered Xun Xi, a capable general, to carry out the task.

"We had better deal with one of them at a time," said the general. "Let us first try to make the duke of Yu allow our army to pass through his land on their way to Guo. He would agree if we bribed him with the best jade and the best steed in your possession."

Duke Xian was hesitant. "The best jade I have was left to me by my father, who loved it very much," he said. "And I use my best horse very often. Besides, the duke of Yu might accept our gifts without giving our army safe passage in return."



“That would not happen,” said Xun Xi. “He would not take the things if he would not allow our army to pass. If he took them with a promise, your jade would only be moved from an inner room to an outer room, and your horse from an inner stable to an outer stable. There is nothing to worry about.”

Duke Xian finally agreed. So Xun Xi went to Yu with the jade and the horse. On seeing the two things, the duke of Yu was delighted, and seemed ready to accept Jin’s request. At this moment, Gong Ziqi, one of the duke’s advisers, sounded a warning.

“The two states, Yu and Guo, are as close to each other as a man’s lips and teeth,” he said. “If the lips are gone, the teeth will be cold, for there is nothing to protect them. Guo has remained independent because Yu is there, and Yu has stayed intact because Guo is there. If we allow the Jin army to attack Guo by way of Yu, Guo will surely be vanquished. And if Guo falls in the morning, Yu will fall in the evening. So we should never allow the Jin army to pass through our land.”

The duke of Yu, however, would not listen to this advice. He promised Xun Xi safe passage. What happened after that was predictable. It was easy for the general to conquer Guo with his overwhelming force. And it was just as easy for him to conquer Yu when he led his army back from Guo to Jin.

On the way, he did not forget to seize the jade and the horse he had presented to the duke of Yu and return them to the duke of Jin.

