

TREASURES OF CHINA ❧ HISTORY STORIES ❧ VOLUME 2

# Chinese History Stories ❧

Stories from the Imperial Era



❧ Edited by Renee Ting

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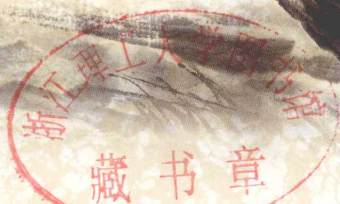


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221BC-AD1912



*Translated from the original Chinese by Qian Jifang*

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## ❖ *Timeline of Chinese History*

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PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA	1949-present

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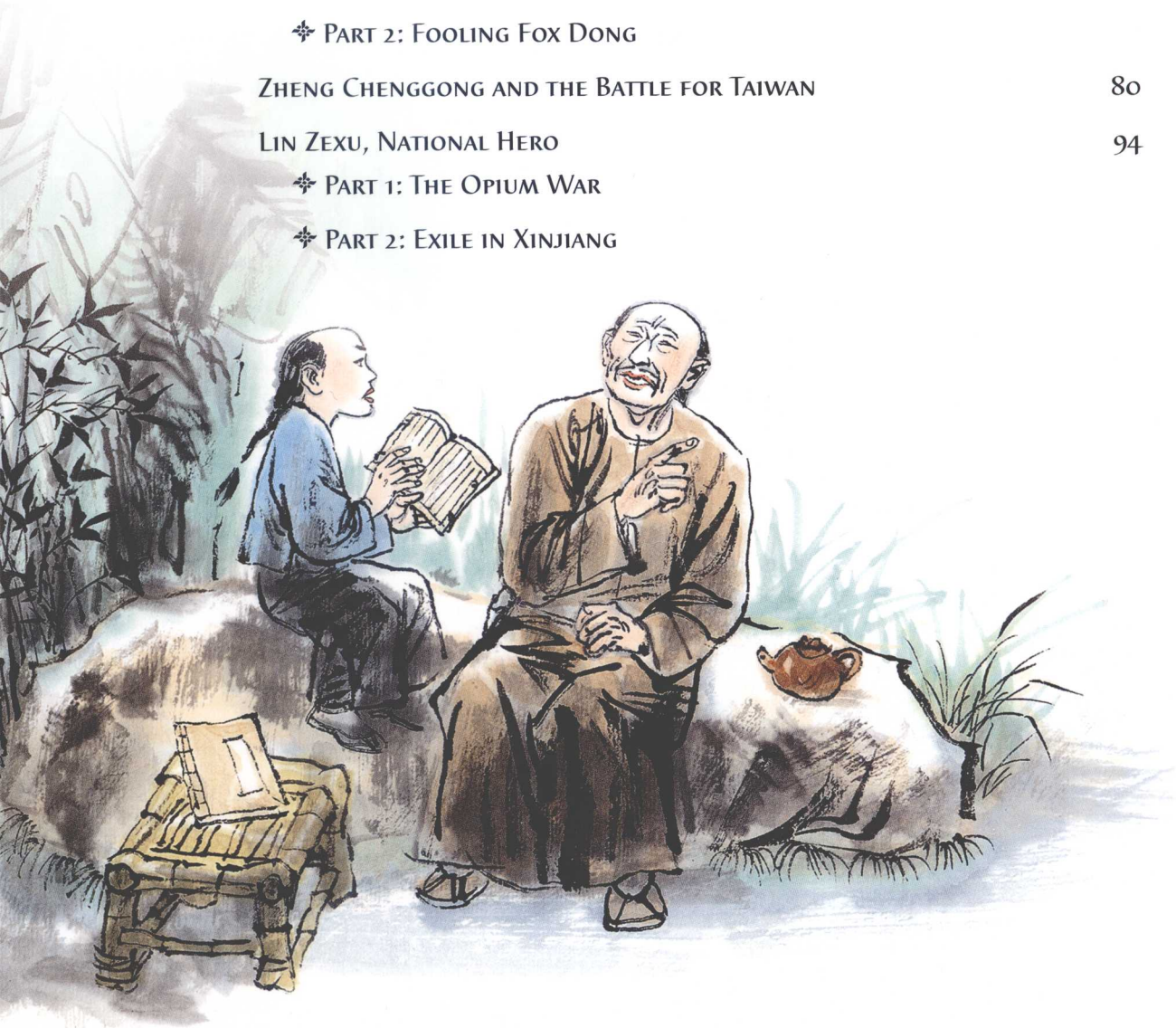
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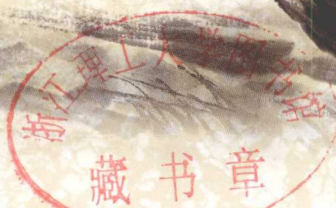
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## ❖ *A Brief Introduction to Chinese History*

The history of China dates back thousands of years, but it wasn't always the big, unified country we know today. In early Chinese history, about 4,000 years ago, China was a much smaller area of land, governed by kings. As the kings passed their power down to their sons, the first dynasties began. There were no written records until the third dynasty, the Zhou dynasty.

The Zhou dynasty was the longest dynasty in Chinese history, lasting from 1122-221 BC. At that time, kings did not yet call themselves emperors and the truth was, they did not have much control over areas far from their own capital. Instead, they granted land to their relatives, friends, and valued followers, who controlled each area themselves. At first, the capital of the Zhou dynasty was located in the western area of the land, but after a rebellion in 771 BC, the new king moved it to the east. Historians thus divide the Zhou dynasty into two periods: the Western Zhou and the Eastern Zhou.

After the capital was moved to the east, local rulers took control over their land and people, creating many small states. Each state was ruled by its own government. Moreover, the states began fighting each other for power and land. This period of fighting during the Eastern Zhou dynasty was called the Spring and Autumn period (771-481 BC), named after a famous book written by the great Chinese philosopher Confucius.

At first, the leaders of the fighting states called themselves dukes, but as they grew stronger, they grew bolder and began to consider themselves kings. The strongest kings defeated the weaker states, and when there were only seven strong states left, the Warring States period (403-221 BC) began. Each of the seven states was independently ruled by its own king, and all of them were constantly occupied by fighting or forming alliances with each other.

In 221 BC, the king of the Qin state conquered all the other states and unified the country of China. He gave himself the name Qin Shi Huangdi, meaning "First Emperor of Qin," and claimed that his power was bestowed upon him by Heaven. He also named his unified country Zhong Guo, meaning "Middle Kingdom," and considered it the center of the universe, while all people outside it were thought to be barbarians.

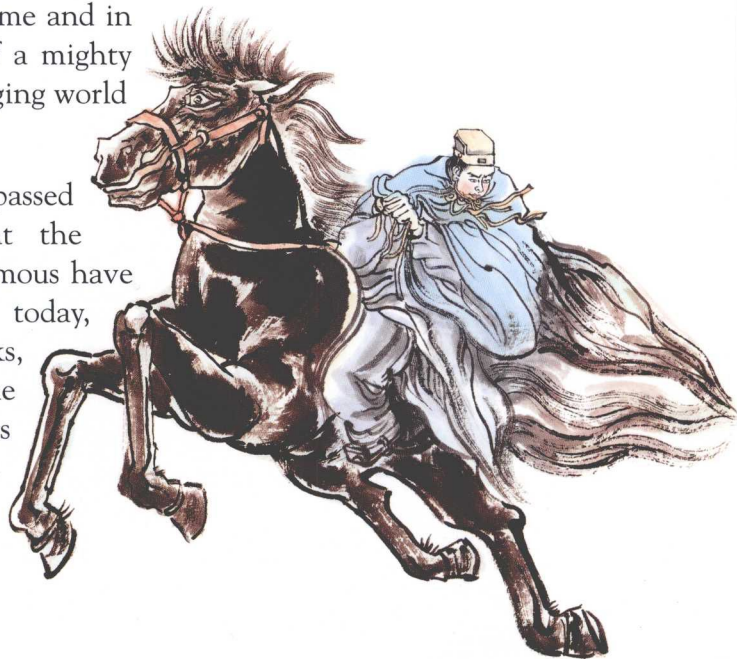
Normally, each emperor would name one of his sons the Crown Prince, who would then become the next emperor. As long as the power stayed within the family, the dynasty would continue. However, the

government in power had to always be alert for rebellions. Sometimes, after a period of fighting, the rebels would win power over the country, and a new dynasty would begin.

Over the next 2,000 years, China was ruled by this system of imperial monarchy. From the Qin dynasty to the last dynasty of Qing, there were fourteen different dynasties, though some were ruled by foreign invaders. Of all the dynasties, a few stand out for their contributions to the culture and history of China. The Qin dynasty is known for the building of the Great Wall, and for the terracotta soldiers in the First Emperor's tomb. The Han dynasty was a time of great strength and extended the Chinese territory westward. The Tang dynasty was a time of flourishing art and poetry. The final dynasty, the Qing, was one of the strongest and most prosperous, encompassing the largest area of land in China's history, until it was weakened by oppression from western countries. In 1912, the Qing dynasty was overthrown by a democratic movement led by Sun Yat Sen and the Republic of China was established. In 1949, the Communist Party, headed by Mao Zedong, took control and renamed the country the People's Republic of China. It is still governed by the Communist Party today.

The eight stories selected for this volume of Chinese History Stories come from the 2,000-year period of imperial rule, from 221 BC until AD 1912. They introduce some of the most famous and beloved figures from this period, including military heroes, clever officials, and even a princess. The stories take place in wartime and in peaceful times, and reflect the spirit of a mighty nation struggling to grow with the changing world around it.

These stories have been passed down for so many generations that the characters and the places they made famous have become legendary. If you visit China today, you can still see many of the landmarks, monuments, and temples built at the time these stories took place, over 2,000 years ago. Join us on a journey into the past of ancient China, and meet the people who shaped its history and live on in the hearts of Chinese people today.



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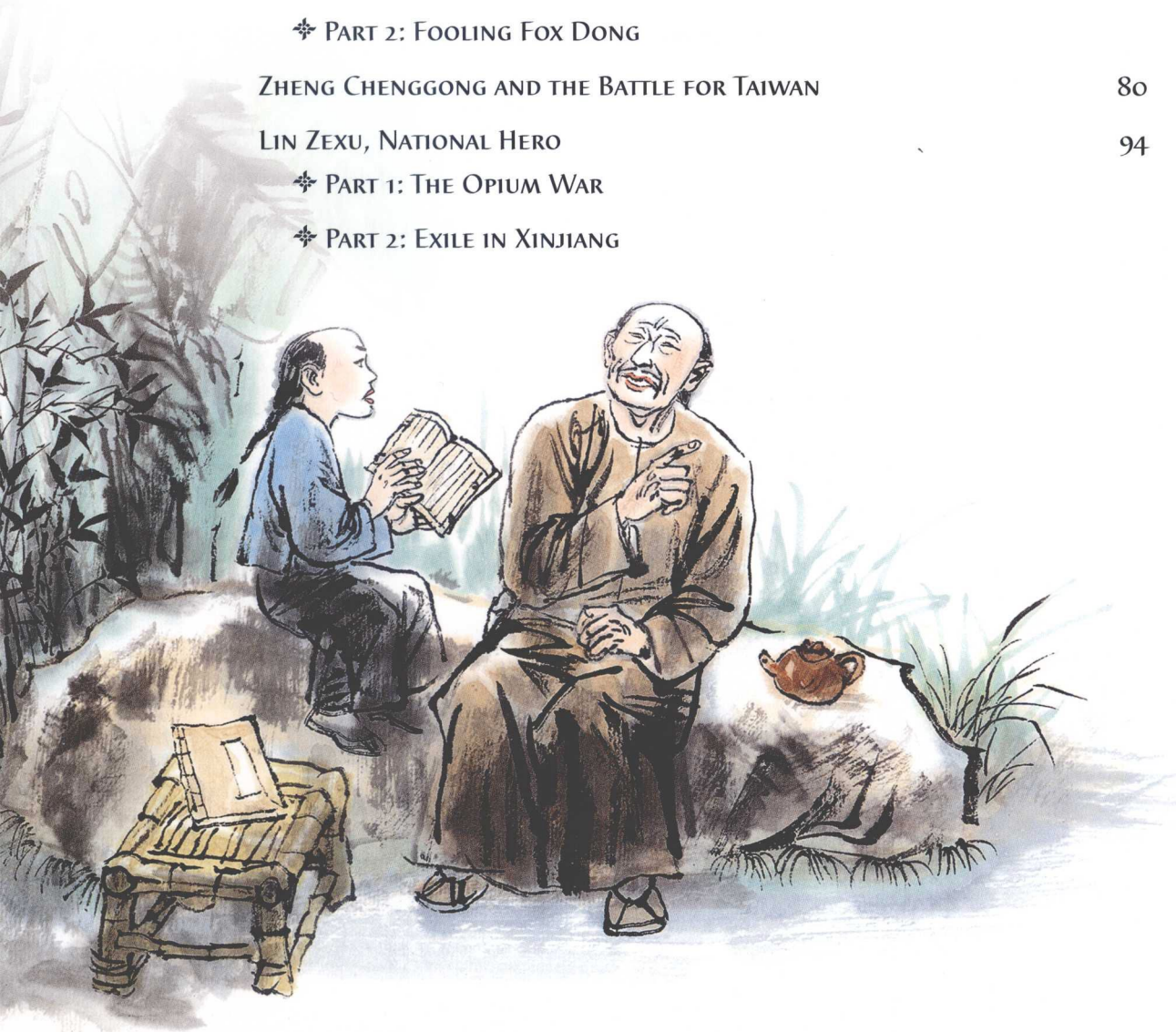
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## ❖ *The Banquet at Hongmen*

# 鸿门宴



**A**fter the death of the first Emperor of the Qin dynasty (221-207 BC), the second Emperor of Qin ascended to the throne. He was even more merciless and brutal than the first and people throughout China despised and feared him. There was widespread unrest and rebellious forces began to gain strength. Xiang Liang, a man from Chu, led the strongest force. Among his troops, two important figures emerged: his nephew Xiang Yu and a southern farmer named Liu Bang.

Through the years, Xiang Liang recruited a large number of followers and he built a strong army. One day, a resourceful man named Fan Zeng came to see him. He proposed a plan for Xiang Liang to gain great power without risking his position.

“Even though we are ruled by the Qin emperor,” he told Xiang Liang, “the common people still cherish their homeland of Chu. If you can establish a member of the Chu royal family as king, the men who were loyal to Chu will come back and fight for you.”

Xiang Liang found a grandson of the former king and set him up as King Huai of Chu. To try to speed up the collapse of Qin, King Huai of Chu issued a decree: “Whoever can conquer the capital of Qin will be recognized by all as the King of Guanzhong.”





The Guanzhong region around Qin's capital was the richest and most influential area of China. To rule Guanzhong was to rule all of China.

The king sent Xiang Liang to the north to fight Qin's main forces. During a fierce battle, Xiang Liang was killed. His nephew, Xiang Yu, took his place as the rebel leader. Xiang Yu, raised by his uncle, was ambitious. He wanted to become the Emperor of Qin someday. He avenged his uncle's death by repeatedly defeating Qin's main forces in the north.

Meanwhile, a young man named Liu Bang, who was raised on a farm in the south of China, led a group from his home state to join the rebellion. He battled his way successfully westward toward Guanzhong.

By the time Xiang Yu fought his way to the Hangu Pass, also known as the Gate to Guanzhong, he found Liu Bang's troops already defending the pass. Though they both fought on the side of the rebellion, Xiang Yu wanted to be the one to take the capital of Qin. When he heard a rumor that Liu Bang had already taken the capital, Xiang Yu and his troops broke through the defenses at the Hangu Pass. Once inside Guanzhong, he and his 400,000 men made camp at Hongmen, a city not far from the capital.

In reality, Liu Bang and his 10,000 men had not yet occupied the capital and were stationed at another city called Ba, only a few dozen miles from Hongmen.





One of Liu Bang's highest officers sent a soldier to Xiang Yu with a secret message. "Beware: Liu Bang intends to occupy the capital and become King of Guanzhong, keeping all its treasures for himself."

Xiang Yu angrily ordered his troops to prepare for an attack on Liu Bang's camp. His advisor Fan Zeng urged him to act quickly to put an end to this threat.

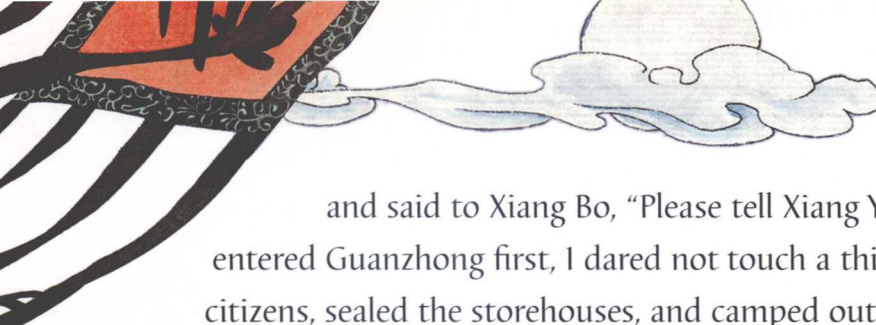
One of Xiang Yu's men named Xiang Bo heard this plan. He had a friend who was the top counselor to Liu Bang and worried for his friend's life. Xiang Bo took a horse and galloped immediately to Liu Bang's camp. When he found his friend, Zhang Liang, he urged him to escape before the attack, which was sure to be deadly. However,



Zhang Liang would not desert Liu Bang. Instead of fleeing, he reported the news to his commander.

Alarmed, Liu Bang asked Zhang Liang for his advice. "My Lord, do you think that our troops are a match for Xiang Yu's troops?" Zhang Liang asked.

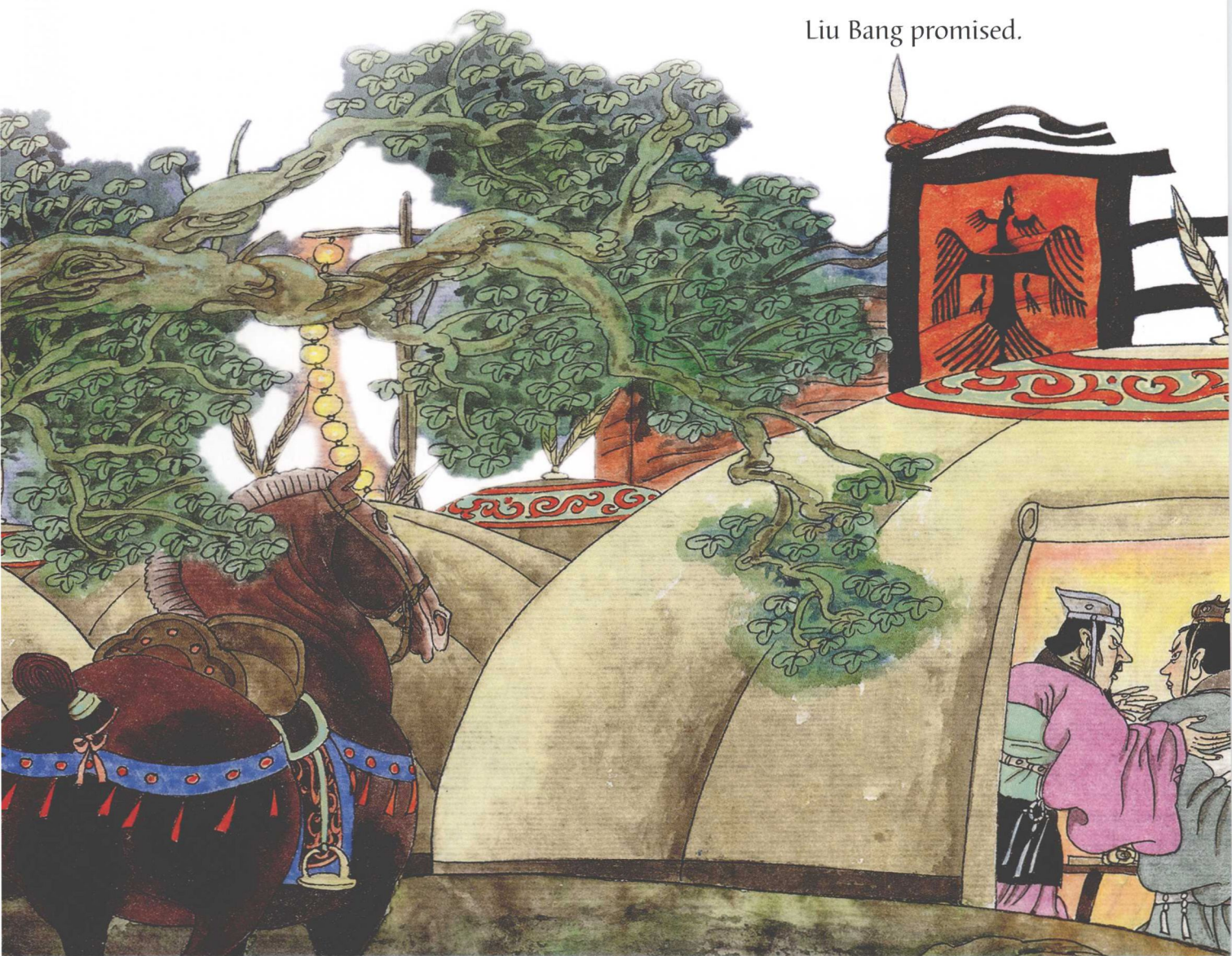
After some thought, Liu Bang replied, "No, we would not be able to withstand an attack. What should we do?" Zhang Liang proposed having his friend Xiang Bo take a message back to Xiang Yu.



Liu Bang agreed and said to Xiang Bo, "Please tell Xiang Yu that although my troops entered Guanzhong first, I dared not touch a thing. I made a register of the citizens, sealed the storehouses, and camped out here to await the arrival of Commander Xiang. I only sent men to guard the Hangu Pass to keep out bandits. We hoped Commander Xiang would arrive quickly. Why would we rebel against him? Please convey to him my sincerity."

Xiang Bo agreed to give the message to Xiang Yu, but added, "You must come early tomorrow morning and apologize in person."

Liu Bang promised.



When Xiang Bo returned to his camp, he went straight to Xiang Yu to relay the message. "Liu Bang took Guanzhong first only to clear the way so that you could enter easily. If we attack him, we would be acting dishonorably. We should treat him respectfully when he arrives."

Xiang Yu nodded in agreement.

The next morning, Liu Bang and a hundred of his men arrived at Hongmen. He bowed to Xiang Yu with respect and said, "Please believe me, I was not expecting to be the first to enter Guanzhong. Someone sowed doubt in your mind so that you would distrust me."

"It was your own general who sent the information," replied Xiang Yu. "Now that the misunderstanding has been cleared up, please join us for a banquet tonight as our honored guest."

That evening, both sides dined together. Throughout the meal, the advisor, Fan Zeng, tried to hint to his commander, Xiang Yu, to take the opportunity to kill Liu Bang. Fan Zeng grew frustrated when Xiang Yu did nothing. Taking matters into his own hands, Fan Zeng excused himself and went to find a guard in Xiang Yu's inner circle.

