

Departed But Not Forgotten



WOMEN OF CHINA special series



DEPARTED
BUT NOT
FORGOTTEN



WOMEN OF CHINA

历代有才干的妇女

中国妇女丛书

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英文《中国妇女》杂志社出版（北京）

外文印刷厂印刷

中国国际图书贸易总公司发行

（中国国际书店）

（北京399信箱）

1984年第一版

编号：（英）1014—17—B

00150

17—E—1772P

CONTENTS

| | |
|---------------------------------------------|-----|
| Foreword | 3 |
| Woman General Fu Hao | 5 |
| China's First Woman Diplomat | 13 |
| A Historian and Product of Her Time | 21 |
| Cai Wenji — A Brilliant but Stifled Talent | 29 |
| An Ancient Calligrapher | 41 |
| A Great Champion of National Unity | 47 |
| Xue Tao — Once Forsaken, Now Revered | 53 |
| Early Cultural Emissaries to Tibet | 67 |
| Li Qingzhao, Woman Poet of the 11th Century | 87 |
| Liang Hongyu, an Intrepid Soldier | 101 |
| Spinner and Weaver Huang Daopo | 111 |
| Leader of Peasant Rebels | 123 |
| More Than a Stargazer | 133 |

| | |
|----------------------------------|-----|
| Taiping Woman Commander and Army | 139 |
| Qiu Jin — Born to Rebel | 151 |
| Inkslab Artist Gu Erniang | 169 |
| Master of Suzhou Embroidery | 175 |

Foreword

WOMEN politicians, writers, historians, artists, scientists and strategists have made outstanding contributions throughout Chinese history. Showing both intelligence and talent, they won the respect of the people of their times in feudal China as well as the people of today.

Nüwa is a goddess in a Chinese legend which is a creation story similar to the Biblical account of God creating the Earth in seven days. It is said that when Heaven and Earth began, the Goddess Nüwa shaped people with the Earth's soil. Since the beginning of written history, the status of women gradually declined and after centuries of feudal rule, women were relegated to the bottom of the social ladder.

However, Chinese women have always played a vital part in social production. The old proverb "women weave the cloth while men tilled the land" speaks well of women's role in feudal society.

Inscriptions on oracle bones dating back 3,700 years tell us of some of the achievements of ancient women. Stories of historic female figures in this book are based on written chronicles. Their imprints on our history of social progress will not be lost and are being given due recognition today.

BAI SHOUYI

Professor of History in the
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WOMAN GENERAL
FU HAO

by
DONG NAIQIANG



FU HAO

Illustration by YANG YONGQING

LITTLE is known about the early life of the warrior and commander Fu Hao who lived during the later Shang Dynasty, some 3,200 years ago. Wife of the Shang emperor Wu Ding, all records of her, inscribed in ancient oracle bone scripture, lead historians to believe that she is one who, taking advantage of her position in that still semi-matriarchal slave society, was able to bring her talents fully into play. In her day, the emperor Wu Ding pushed the Shang empire to its zenith by extending his realm of power through the cultivation of loyal collaborators. Many local tribes came over and pledged allegiance to him. In good faith Wu Ding married one woman from each such tribe, and Fu Hao was one of those wives. Nonetheless, she has gone down in history not so much as a wife of a great emperor but as a stateswoman and an outstanding strategist, in her own right.

Productivity in her time was low and knowledge about nature and society was restricted to religious explanations. Sacrifices were common practice, and seen as a way of appeasing the gods in the hopes of being protected and blessed with happiness. The royal family and slave owners especially relied on their religious beliefs and made a great show of it, making sacrificial ceremony the most important political activity of the day. These offerings could be made to any of a number of gods or ancestors, asking for the prevention of epidemics and natural disasters, for victory in war, and so forth. The ceremonies were presided

over by such high-ranking personages as Fu Hao. These ceremonies were usually held inside the ancestral temple of the rulers filled with the necessary accoutrements. Solemnly and properly dressed for the occasion, the participants, nobles and commoners alike, strictly followed the direction of the master of the ceremony. Standing at a prominent place and reading aloud on behalf of the Shang court, Fu Hao was recorded to have presented sacrificial offerings to the gods. These characteristically included live animals such as oxen, or humans — normally slaves and war prisoners.

Fu Hao's presiding role at such ceremonies was deduced from the large collection of sacrificial bronze vessels unearthed in 1976 from her tomb in Xiaotun Village, in Anyang, Henan Province (the site of the Shang capital). The collection included an enormous cooking utensil bearing many inscriptions of the name Fu Hao. Among the artifacts are also tortoise shells bearing the characters "prepared by Fu Hao", which shows that Fu Hao was also in charge of divination rites. At that time, it was the task of the diviner to prepare tortoise shells or ox shoulder blades by chiseling small indentations in them to hold granulated charcoal. During the divination ceremonies, the shells or bones were baked on a fire until they formed cracks. These cracks were then studied, and it was believed that one could foretell a future event based on the pattern so created. The process and outcome were carved on these

shells or bones afterwards by the diviner. The fact that Fu Hao was a diviner points up her political status.

It can be seen from ancient historical records that the major functions of the state at that time fell into two categories: to conduct sacrificial and divination ceremonies and to do battle. The records show that Fu Hao played an important part in a series of wars during the reign of Wu Ding.

As the mere size of an army often determined the outcome of a battle, especially when fairly primitive weapons were in use, the Shang regime rulers paid much attention to recruitment, and in keeping with the spirit, Fu Hao drew soldiers from within her own country and from neighboring tribes as well. It is found in the records that Fu Hao led generals and a huge army of ten thousand soldiers in battles. The two big *yue*, or battle-axes, found in her tomb weighing 9 kilos each, and two smaller ones all bearing the inscription of Fu Hao, are indications of her military authority.

The Shang territories were surrounded by hostile tribes. The Tus inhabited about one thousand *li* north of the Shang capital and repeatedly violated the Shang borders, seizing men and materials. Shang emperors prior to Wu Ding fought them many times but could not defeat them. History tells us that they were at last forced to surrender by Fu Hao in a single decisive battle, after which they became compliant.



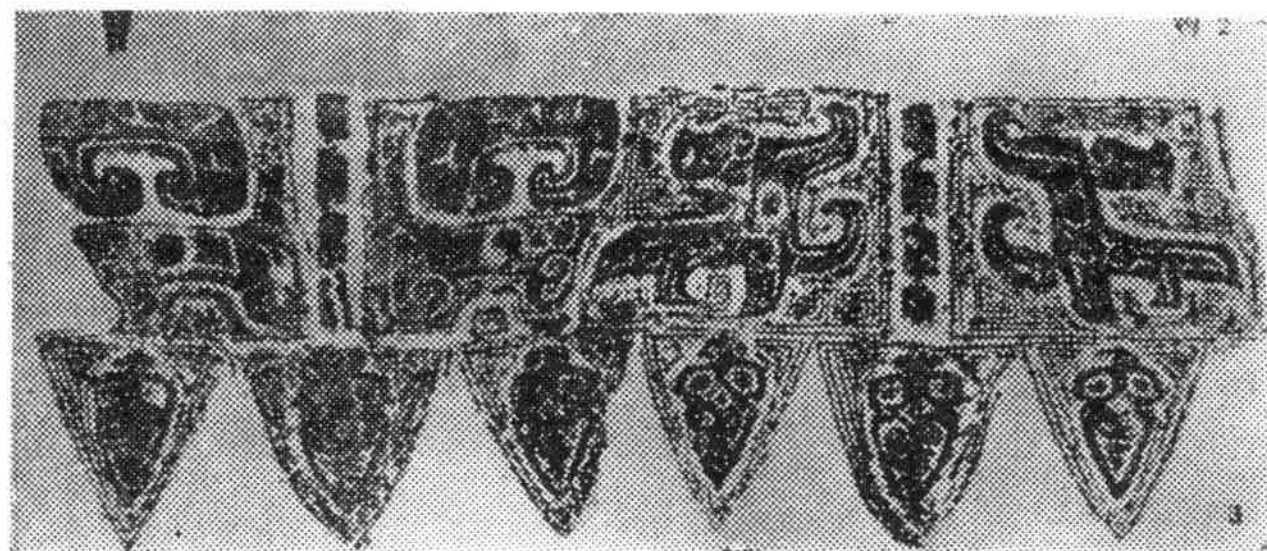
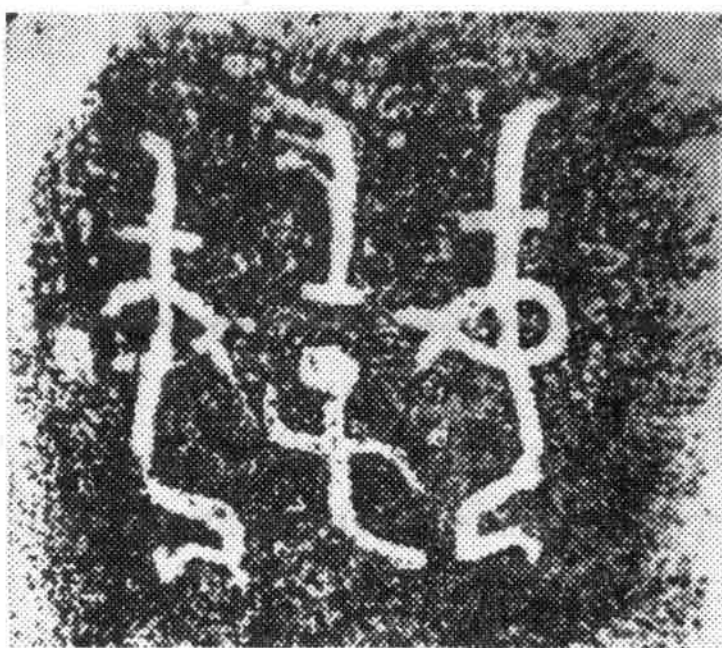
A bronze utensil, **ding**, from the Fu Hao Tomb.

The Yis, to the southeast, were not very strong but sometimes also made incursions into Shang territory. Under Wu Ding's order, Fu Hao's troops defeated them easily. Her force also repulsed the attacks of the Qiangs from the

northwest. The Bafangs in the southwest were also a belligerent people. Wu Ding made a surprise attack, forcing them to flee right into the hands of Fu Hao's men who were waiting in ambush.

The Shangs suffered considerably after the death of Fu Hao. The Gongfang to the north took to battle against the Shangs, threatening the latter's very existence. Worried, Wu Ding made re-

Close-up of the design and the inscription "Fu Hao" on this bronze ding.



peated appeals and sacrifices to the spirit of Fu Hao in the hope that she would help him defeat the invaders.

All her life Fu Hao had been economically independent. Like other leaders and meritorious chiefs, she was granted extra land by the emperor in addition to her own. She managed the land herself, and the yields were hers. She also possessed large numbers of valuable articles, such as bronze vessels, jade pieces and shell money. The findings in her tombs included bronze vessels weighing over 500 kilograms in total, more than 6,000 jade pieces and over 7,000 pieces of shell money which constituted a large fortune amassed during the course of her lifetime. What was more, she had in her possession slaves, also given to her by the emperor or taken in battles. Sixteen of these were buried with her. It is most impressive to note that she was so respected by the later emperors that she was honored with her own tomb instead of being buried with Emperor Wu Ding after his death.

The Zhou Dynasty that succeeded the Shang was set up on a feudal patriarchal clan system under which women's status was greatly reduced. Women who had taken part in politics and military affairs during the Shang Dynasty were snubbed as rebels or "hens reporting the dawn". Women under the Zhou were deprived of the right to personal property, and from that time on, they were at the mercy of the gods, the clan and the husband.

CHINA'S FIRST WOMAN DIPLOMAT

by
XING TIANSHOU



After Feng Liao arrived in Wusun, she established friendly ties with the tribes in the Western Regions.

Illustration by LIU FUFANG