

woman or a pretty young girl. Confucius once remarked, "If I had judged by looks alone I would have sadly mistaken Ziyu." The same might be said of Zhang Liang.

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translated by Burton Watson

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SHI JI 56: THE HEREDITARY HOUSE OF PRIME MINISTER CHEN

With the six curious strategies of his devising, the other nobles were brought to submission and became followers of the Han, while in the overthrow of the Lü family he was the chief plotter, assuring in the end the safety of the dynasty's ancestral temples and the continuance of its altars of the soil and grain. Thus I made "The Hereditary House of Prime Minister Chen".

CHEN PING

Prime Minister Chen Ping was a native of Huyou county in Yangwu.¹ When he was young he loved to read. His family was very poor and owned only thirty *mu*² of farm land. Chen Ping lived alone with his older brother, who did all the work in the fields, leaving Chen Ping free to pursue his studies as he wished. Chen Ping was tall and very good-looking. Someone once remarked to him, "If your family is so poor, what in the world do you eat that you grow so big and plump?" Chen Ping's older brother's wife, who was very put out that Chen Ping did nothing to help the family finances, took it upon herself to answer. "And yet he eats nothing but husks and leavings like the rest of us!"³ she exclaimed sarcastically. "Better to have no brother at all than one like this!" When Chen Ping's older brother heard what his wife had said, he drove her out of the house and broke off the marriage.

After a while Chen Ping reached the age for taking a wife himself. But since none of the wealthy families were willing to offer him their daughters, and since he was too proud to marry a girl from a poor family, time passed and he remained single. In Huyou there lived a rich old woman named Zhang. This Dame Zhang had a granddaughter who had married five times, but each time her husband had

¹In the region of Wei.

²The Han *mu* was equal to about 0.114 acre, so that the Huyou family had less than three-and-a-half acres.

³That is, he grows fat not by what he eats but because he does no work.