

# Lady Fu Hao

## Who Was She?

Lady Fu Hao was one of the many wives of King Wu Ding; a king of the Shang dynasty in ancient China who reigned between approximately 1250 and 1192 BC. The Shang Dynasty was centred around the Yellow River in north east China and is famous for its bronze and jade artwork.

Lady Fu Hao had many roles including being a general and a high priestess and controlling her own territory on the outskirts of the Empire. She was the first female military leader in known history. Lady Fu Hao, also known as Mu Xin, was clearly held in high regard by the king as it was rare for women to perform ritual ceremonies like Lady Fu Hao did. According to old inscriptions, she once led 13,000 soldiers into battle against the Qiang people (one of many ethnic groups in China).



Lady Fu Hao was a powerful woman both during her life and after she died around 1250 BC. Her tomb, when it was found by archaeologists in 1976, was the only royal tomb from the Shang dynasty that was fully intact and still had her precious things in, meaning historians could learn a lot from it.

## Did You Know...?

The Shang were the first Chinese to develop writing. They used pictographs, characters and other images to express meaning.



## Lady Fu Hao's Tomb

Her tomb was discovered in modern day Anyang, the location of the last capital city of the Shang. It was built smaller than other royal tombs and was situated outside the main royal cemetery. Because she died before her husband, a tomb was built for her which was a large pit measuring 5.6 metres by 4 metres. The corpse of Lady Fu Hao was placed in a lacquered coffin within a wooden chamber. There may have been something built over the tomb to allow people to hold memorial ceremonies.

### What Did They Find in Her Tomb?

In her tomb, archaeologists found:

- The remains of 6 dogs and 16 humans.
- Over 450 bronze objects (including 130 weapons, 23 bells, 27 knives, 4 tigers and 4 mirrors)
- Over 750 jade objects
- 63 stone objects
- 5 ivory objects (ivory was a precious material)
- Over 550 bone objects (mainly bone hairpins and some arrowheads)
- 11 pottery objects
- Almost 7,000 cowry shells (Shang currency)



**The ding (a sacrificial container) found in the tomb is named the 'HouMuWu'. It weighs a massive 875kg!**

### Human Sacrifice

Human sacrifices were also performed as part of a ritual at the burial of an important person. This was done because the Shang believed that it would provide that individual with servants to serve them in the afterlife. Fu Hao was clearly considered important as the skeletons of 16 human beings were buried around the perimeter of her tomb.

#### Interesting Fact

The Shang society was divided into different classes. The royal family were of course at the top, followed by priests, warriors, craftsmen, traders and farmers and at the very bottom of the class system were slaves.

**Lady Fu Hao the Military Leader**

Lady Fu Hao led many military campaigns and even defeated the rival tribe of Tu-Fang who had remained undefeated previously, in one single battle. As well as leading thousands of soldiers, Fu Hao had important generals serving under her and she went on to lead several successful military campaigns against neighbouring kingdoms. She was not only the first known female military leader, she was the most successful and powerful military leader of her time, male or female. Fu Hao was awarded land from the territories that she conquered and became an active politician and spiritual leader, both of which were unusual roles for women at the time.





# Lady Fu Hao Questions

1. Who was Lady Fu Hao married to?

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2. What materials did the Shang Dynasty use in their craft work? Tick **one**.

- ☐ diamonds and jade
- ☐ silver and gold
- ☐ bronze and copper
- ☐ bronze and jade

3. Who was Mu Xin?

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4. What was King Wu Ding's attitude towards Lady Fu Hao and how do you know?

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5. When did Lady Fu Hao die? Tick **one**.

- ☐ around 1192 BC
- ☐ around 1250 BC
- ☐ around 1000 BC
- ☐ around 1950 BC

6. **Find** and **copy** a word which means **dead body**.

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7. What do the objects found in Lady Fu Hao's tomb tell us about her? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

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8. Explain why you would not want to be a slave in the Shang Dynasty. Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

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9. Name two ways in which Lady Fu Hao was a pioneering woman.

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