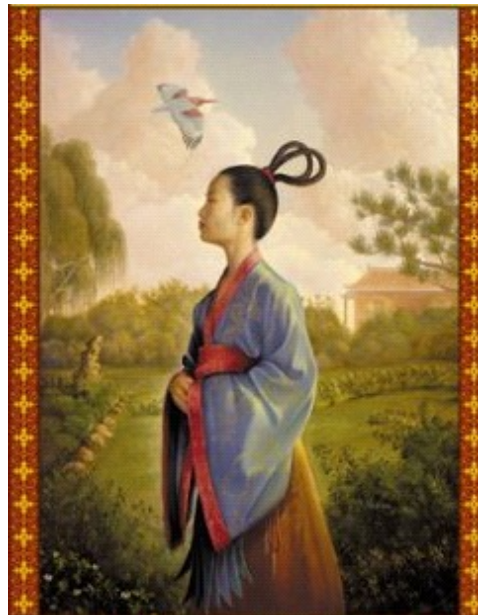


Nataly Kelly

## PRINCESS RED BIRD

To meet this month's inspiring interpreter, let's step back in time to medieval China. At that time in history, the Chinese would frequently send prisoners and exiles to Southern China. Many intermarried with the different tribes in the region, mixing cultures, ideas, and of course -- languages. This is the context in which the **Lady of Ch'iao Kuo**, also known as **Princess Red Bird**, became an interpreter.



**Madame Interpreter? Try "Her Royal Highness the Interpreter" instead...**

Born around 516 A.D., Red Bird was from the **Hsien** tribe, but her father believed that she should learn Chinese if the Hsien people were to survive. She traveled to a nearby Chinese village to attend a Chinese school -- this was at a time when schools were only for boys, and the presence of a girl in school was seen as revolting. **Red Bird learned to speak Chinese fluently in addition to her native Hsien.** Through her studies, she also developed an appreciate for Chinese history, literature, and culture.

Hsien used her language skills during a time of war and extreme violence, in which she frequently saw her tribe members raped and beheaded during attacks. She encouraged an appreciation of Chinese language and culture among her native people. **Her ability to interpret between Chinese and Hsien ultimately helped her tribe to become allies and friends of the Chinese**, which, as her father had predicted, was crucial to their survival.

Princess Red Bird was not the type of noblewoman who sat back away from the people. Instead, **she often led them into battle herself**. Even in her 60's and after the death of her husband, this warrior princess was often found leading her troops into battle alone to defend her people. At that time, women simply did not do such things, nor were they normally important enough to appear in history books. To the Chinese, Princess Red Bird's accomplishments seemed especially astounding.

Because of her remarkable story, Princess Red Bird was featured prominently in the Standard History of the Sui Dynasty by Wei Qiang. A full four pages were devoted to her in this book, making her **one of the rare female figures to be remembered in Chinese medieval history**. The only work in English devoted to her is a book of historical fiction, *Lady of Ch'iao Kuo: Warrior of the South* by [Laurence Yep](#). She died in 601 A.D., but not until she reached the age of 85.