

Creators of an Emperor: The Political Group behind the Founding of the Han Empire

The enthronement of Liu Bang 劉邦 initiated China's first lasting empire, the Han 漢 (206 BC–220 AD), and created a model of emperorship for over two millennia of subsequent dynasties. Han emperorship was a mode of Chinese authoritarianism different from the extremism of the Qin, and Liu Bang's shadow can be recognized in many later monarchs, from Zhu Yuanzhang to Mao Zedong.¹ The founding of the Han was achieved by a large group of people, addressed at the time and in subsequent history as “Meritorious Officials 功臣,” who supported Liu Bang in the civil war and enthroned him as the emperor. This group was, in essence, responsible for founding the Han dynasty and instituting its particular model of emperorship. To understand the formation of the Han dynasty, and more importantly, of the political culture that bred authoritarianism, we need to understand the nature of this political group and its members' divergent interests in promoting emperorship.

Rather than focusing on the position of the group in the institutions of the empire, I study the participants' own understandings and interpretations of the process of creating an emperor. My focus is not so much on the facts of events, as much as on how events were understood and interpreted by the participants and subsequent writers of the time. In other words, I want to bring to the analytical foreground the multitude of thoughts and words that motivated the actions and constructed the events involved in creating an emperor, since it is through both words and deeds that we can allocate responsibility among those who created monarchy.² To do so, I investigate three specific ques-

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¹ Michael Loewe has pointed out many parallels between Liu Bang and Mao in his review article, “Let the Present Serve the Past,” review of *Private Life of Chairman Mao: The Memoirs of Mao's Personal Physician*, in *Modern Asian Studies* 31.1 (1997), pp. 209–23.

² According to Wai-ye Li's study, the belief that human moral responsibility should be the primary concern of history has been held by historians of China such as Sima Qian and Liu Zhiji, and the argument for human responsibility, against historical inevitability, is also

tions: 1. what was these people's stated rationale for raising Liu Bang, a commoner just like themselves, to the position of emperor; 2. how did they understand their motives for joining Liu Bang and what kinds of relationships bound them into a group; and 3. what were the internal tensions and dynamics that shaped the nature of the group and of the empire they created?

By analyzing the many contradictory and multivoiced accounts found in *Shiji* and *Hanshu*, I argue that the group's stated rationale for enthroning Liu Bang – namely, the potential of his sharing the empire with them as near equals – was actually a point of great contention. The contention was embedded in the entangled personal and contractual bonds linking the group to Liu Bang, and the effect was to reveal the bonds as primarily various vertical ties between the followers as individuals and the person of the leader himself. There was little sense of group identity, common interest, or open dialogue. Once the emperor was produced, the same political group perpetuated the concentration of power in the emperor by eliminating its own powerful members one by one, leading to the group's self-destruction. In this process, elements of the group differentiated into new factions, revolving around the emperor's person. Furthermore, the tensions within and among these factions were to dominate the political life of the dynasty.

Previous scholarship has explained the formation of China's early empires mainly in terms of various kinds of historical patterns, which all seem to demonstrate some form of historical inevitability. Such traditional histories as *Shiji* and *Hanshu* account for Liu Bang's success mainly in terms of his possessing the Mandate of Heaven.³ Modern European thinkers have conceptualized Chinese empires in terms of grand structures – the Hegelian concept of an “Oriental Despot,” Weber's bureaucracy, or Marxist modes of production – each representing a certain kind of historical determinism. Under such influence, Western sinology has devoted much attention to the sophisticated Qin and Han bureaucracy. Similarly, modern Chinese scholars have applied class analysis and historical materialism to reinterpret Chinese civilization, generalizing it in a totalizing history of the “continuity of feudalism,”

central to the thinking of the modern philosopher Isaiah Berlin. See Wai-yee Li, “The Idea of Authority in the *Shih chi* (Records of the Historian),” *HJAS* 54.2 (1994), pp. 345–405, 400–1 (and n. 78).

³ These texts include the believed verifications of the Mandate of Heaven, such as various mythical signs on his body, the tales that Liu Bang was fathered by a dragon, the observation that clouds gathered above him wherever he went, and numerous fateful moments when he was saved by a turn of the tide in his favor.

the “cyclic repetition of authoritarianism,” or the “ultra-stability” of the dynastic structure. Such historical materialism explains that Liu Bang represented the new productive relations and a new, centralized state, whereas his rival, Xiang Yu, represented a regression to pre-Qin society.

Departing from such forms of historical determinism in search of more subtle humanistic issues of historical meaning and responsibility, I attempt a different, more anthropological reading of early Han history. Moving away from totalizing structural analysis, I look into the intermediate level, the meritorious officials who made Liu Bang the emperor. Half a century ago, the Japanese scholar Nishijima Sadao 西島定生 first studied this group as a prototype of the Han empire, stating that the group was organized in a patriarch-servant relationship of a pseudo-lineage.⁴ Greatly influenced by Nishijima, Li Kaiyuan has argued recently that the group dominated early-Han government and defined the Han empire, which he calls a constitutional monarchy and federated empire.⁵ My approach to the group is somewhat different. Where Nishijima and Li treat the “Meritorious Officials” as a coherent structural group who shared common political and economic interests, I examine its internal conflicts, divergent interests, and incoherent motives.

HISTORY IN THE MAKING, WRITING, AND READING

Our knowledge of Liu Bang’s rise to power comes almost exclusively from two transmitted texts, *Shiji* 史記 (*Records of the Historian*), written by Sima Qian around 100 BC, and *Hanshu* 漢書 (*History of the Former Han Dynasty*) by Ban Gu of about 90 AD. The chapters concerning the rise and early years of the Han in the two texts are nearly identical. Most scholars believe that Ban Gu simply copied over from *Shiji* those sections dealing with the second century BC. Yet A. F. P. Hulswé suspects the opposite, that the *Shiji* chapters covering this period that have come down to us were copied from *Hanshu* in the fourth century.⁶ Since inter-textual transmission was a common practice at the time, it

⁴ He later gave up this conclusion and turned to the aristocratic orders (*jue zhi*) as the basic structure of the Qin and Han. For a summary of Nishijima’s theory, see Li Kaiyuan, *Han diguo de jianli yu Liu Bang jituan* 漢帝國的建立與劉邦集團 (Beijing: Sanlian, 2000), pp. 3–5.

⁵ Li, *Han diguo*, pp. 246–60.

⁶ A. F. P. Hulswé, “Notes on the Historiography of the Han Period,” in W. G. Beasley and E. G. Pulleyblank, eds., *Historians of China and Japan* (London: Oxford U.P., 1961), p. 34; and idem, “Founding Fathers and Yet Forgotten Men: A Closer Look at the Tables of the Nobility in the *Shih chi* and the *Han shu*,” *TP* 75 (1989), p. 43, n. 3. His study of *Shiji* 123 proves

is only reasonable to read both texts in conjunction without assuming either one to have an authentic origin.

The validity of the two works as reliable history has long been questioned, and three problems have formed the major basis for invalidating such texts for objective history: they are later constructions, composed a century or two after the actual events; they are full of contradictions and inconsistencies; and their many fictional details could be anything but objective records of facts. Facing these problems, scholars have never formed a consensus on how to use them. While many use them as accurate records of historical events, others have critically invalidated them as later fabrications. The debate over the reliability of basic historical sources has recently intensified in heated debates.⁷

Much meticulous scholarship has been devoted to distinguishing the more reliable parts of the texts from the fictions and forgeries.⁸ Among all the accounts of this particular period, the records on enfeoffment, edicts, and law found in the annals, tables, and treatises have been given more historical value, while the vivid biographical accounts found in the Hereditary Houses and Memoirs (which are mostly biographies) have often been considered fictional. Hans Bielenstein and Hulsewé both rightly cautioned us to be suspicious of reported conversations held in secret without witnesses, and passages containing lively scenes: “the livelier the scene, the greater the chance that this would be the product of the historian’s brilliant imagination, but not history.”⁹

Because of these problems, *Shiji* and *Hanshu* have been used with relatively more confidence in order to study the lives and times of their

this point; idem, “The Problem of the Authenticity of *Shih-chi* ch. 123: The Memoir on Ta Yüan,” *TP* 61.1–3 (1975), pp. 83–147, but I would be hesitant to say that the same is true of most biographical chapters of this period. The style of these chapters, especially the ones on Xiang Yu and Han Xin, is more like Sima Qian’s than Ban Gu’s.

⁷ The debate is summarized by David Schaberg, who takes a neo-positivist stance in calling for a disciplinary consensus on an objective, empirically accurate history of early China; Schaberg, “Texts and Artifacts: A Review of *The Cambridge History of Ancient China*,” *MS* 48 (2001), pp. 463–515.

⁸ Important examples in Chinese include Cui Shi 崔適, *Shiji tan yuan* 史記探源 (1934; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986); Liang Yusheng 梁玉繩, *Shiji zhiyi* 史記志疑 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1981); Zhao Yi 趙翼, *Nian er shi zha ji* 廿二史劄記 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1963); and Jin Dejian 金德建, *Sima Qian so jian shu kao* 司馬遷所見書考 (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 1963). Sophisticated Western studies include Édouard Chavannes, *Les Mémoires Historiques de Se-ma Ts'ien* (Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1895–1905); Hulsewé, “Historiography of the Han Period;” Hulsewé, “Problem of the Authenticity of *Shih-chi*”; Homer H. Dubs, “The Reliability of Chinese Histories,” *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 6.1 (1946), pp. 23–43; Michael Loewe, ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China, 1993).

⁹ Hans Bielenstein, *The Restoration of the Han Dynasty*, vol. 1, *BMFEA* 26 (1954), pp. 50, 73; Hulsewé, “Founding Fathers,” p. 51.

authors.¹⁰ But I believe the works, being later constructions, provide us access to a much longer process of constructing meaning and memory, starting from the moments of events and extending beyond writing into reading. Moreover, because they are somewhat encyclopedic in nature, they anthologized “all earlier texts” available to them at the time,¹¹ and consequently represent not only the compilers’ perspectives but also those of many other writers before them. Furthermore, the inconsistency and fictional details of these texts are actually precious sources of historical knowledge. Recent literary readings of *Shiji* give much value to such inconsistency.¹² As a historian, I too explore the wealth of historical knowledge embedded in such inconsistency – the multiple voices of the actors, conflicting perspectives, and contradictory values and interests. Yet I depart from these literary readings where they attribute the inconsistency and multivalency to Sima Qian, the author behind the text, as his intended means of making personal statements. Instead, I treat them as products of writing itself – as an intermingling of the widest possible range of sources and contesting perspectives, rather than as unified constructs of singular authors.¹³ Similarly, fictional details, the most obvious evidence for invalidating the texts as history, are also significant for historical analysis. The texts use details such as whispers and secret dialogues to create not just characters in the

¹⁰ Mark Lewis has analyzed the *Shiji* as a textual form to a world empire, as part of the “encyclopedic epoch” and one of the totalizing writings of the time of political and cultural unification; Mark Edward Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: State U. of New York P., 1999), pp. 308–17. Wai-ye Li, in contrast, reads *Shiji* as the statement of the historian’s independent authority, criticizing the unification and opposing the authority of the empire; Li, “Idea of Authority.” Stephen Durrant attributes *Shiji* to the tension of Sima Qian’s own enormous creative energy, bursting out from his personal frustration and suffering; Stephen W. Durrant, *The Cloudy Mirror: Tension and Conflict in the Writings of Sima Qian* (Albany: State U. of New York P., 1995).

¹¹ Lewis, *Writing and Authority*, pp. 308–17.

¹² Durrant analyzes various tensions, ambiguities, multiple voices, and inconsistency in the *Shiji*, ending his study by stating that Sima Qian is “a literary genius who writes his story as much as history.” See Durrant, *Cloudy Mirror*, p. 143. Grant Hardy, seeing *Shiji* as a “web of history” with multiple narrations, asserts that it is “clearly a work of history.” See Grant Hardy, *Worlds of Bronze and Bamboo* (Columbia U.P., 1999), p. 124. Li, “Idea of Authority,” p. 399, validates *Shiji* as objective history, based precisely on such inconsistency and pluralism. Appreciating such multivalency, she concludes that Sima Qian’s impartiality and appreciation of the plurality of human existence rank the work equal to all “true historiography,” reaching the “highest type of objectivity.”

¹³ Roland Barthes states that the “author” is a modern product, which gives a semblance of logical coherence to a process that is in fact highly complex and incoherent. A text consists not of words releasing a single meaning originating from the author, but of “a multi-dimensional space in which are married and contested several writings, none of which is original: the text is a fabric of quotations, resulting from a thousand sources of culture”; Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in idem, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1984), p. 53.

story, but also the “reality effect,” which rests on the majority opinion of a community of readers.¹⁴ Such readers’ sense of reality, collectively constructed and represented in the *Shiji*, could tell us much about the multiple versions of “the truth” that developed at the time.

TO SHARE THE WORLD: THE LOGIC OF THE HAN THRONE

When Liu Bang took the throne in 202 BC, he inherited from the Qin the title of emperor, “*huangdi* 皇帝,” and continued most of the Qin institutions, policies, and religious practices. This inheritance from the Qin lasted through the first five reigns of the Han dynasty.¹⁵ But Han emperorship was fundamentally different from that of the Qin in origin, foundation, and essential rationale. Qin emperorship was the climax of centralized, absolute political power, based on the emperor’s personal achievement 寡人政治, whereas Han emperorship was marked by diffusing its power among compartments of the empire, based on the collective effort and consensus of what the participants called “sharing the world 共天下.”¹⁶ This characteristic of Han rulership has often been seen as caused by the temporary weakness of the Han throne due to civil war. But I argue that it was both the very foundation of Liu Bang’s emperorship and the source of the empire’s greatest internal conflict.

The difference between Qin and Han rulership is most evident in the stated rationale for the emperors’ enthronement. In the edict creating the new title and institution of emperorship, the First Emperor of Qin claimed he was not only entitled to rule the world but also deserved a new title to glorify his unprecedented achievement of conquest and unification:

I with my single body raised the troops to put down the revolt and disorder. Thanks to the help of ancestral spirits, I convicted the six kings for their crimes, and put All-under-Heaven into order. Without changing the title of the throne, there would be no way to glorify these achievements and pass them on to later generations.¹⁷

¹⁴ This term is borrowed from Barthes, “The Reality Effect,” in *Rustle of Language*, pp. 144–47.

¹⁵ Historians have thus long characterized the first five reigns of the early Han (from emperors Gao to Jing) as continuations of the Qin system. See Michael Loewe, “The Former Han Dynasty,” in Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe, eds., *The Cambridge History of China* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1986), vol. 1, pp. 103–10.

¹⁶ That “Meritorious Officials” shared power has long been recognized by historians. For examples, see Qian Mu 錢穆, *Qin Han shi* 秦漢史 (Hong Kong: Da Zhongguo Press, 1969), pp. 41–63; Xu Zhuoyun [Hsu Cho-yun], “Xi Han zhengzhi yu shehui shili de jiaohu zuoyong” 西漢政治與社會勢力的交互作用, in idem, ed., *Qiu gu bian* 求古編 (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1986), p. 454. For a special study of this subject, see Li, *Han diguo*, pp. 133–43.

¹⁷ Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959; hereafter *SJ*) 6, p. 236;

The First Emperor of Qin thus defined imperial sovereignty as an absolute despotic power based on his personal achievement – the conquest of the six kingdoms achieved with his “single body.” The words of the new title *huangdi* (“august emperor”) represent the undivided power and absolute authority that were concentrated in his person and that surpassed all the former kings. Besides “the help of ancestral spirits,” he acknowledged no other divine or human assistance.

For the first emperor of Han, the stated rationale for his enthronement was distinctly different. First of all, it came in the form not of an imperial edict but of petitions from confederates and supporters. The only such petition that has come down to us was made by seven confederate kings, presented immediately following their enfeoffment as kings in 202 BC. Almost as an exchange with Liu Bang for their kingships, they pleaded with him to accept their offer of the title of emperor, justifying it on two clear grounds – achievement and virtue:

You, the great King, were the first to capture the king of Qin and subjugate Guanzhong – your achievements have been the greatest in the world ... You have moreover granted favors to the vassal kings who have merit, enabling them to succeed in setting up their own gods of the soil and grains (that is, to establish their own state and dynasty). The division of land has already been settled, but positions and titles are [still] confounded with one another, without the [proper] division of the superior [from] the inferior, so that the manifestation of your, the great King’s, merits and virtue is not proclaimed to later generations. Risking death and making repeated obeisances, we offer to our superior the honorable title of emperor.¹⁸

According to the petition, Liu Bang’s achievement was purely military. The empire was won by military conquest, and among all the meritorious kings, the achievement of Liu Bang, king of Han, was the greatest. Therefore, the hierarchical relation of the kings to the new emperor was that of inferiors to a superior, based on lesser or greater achievement in the same military affairs. Liu Bang’s virtue, furthermore, was clearly defined as establishing the meritorious as kings and allowing them to have their own states; offering Liu Bang the title of

Aihe Wang, *Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2000), p. 141.

¹⁸ Ban Gu 班固, *Hanshu* 漢書 (Beijing, Zhonghua Shuju, 1962; hereafter *HS*) 1B, p. 52; and Homer H. Dubs, *The History of the Former Han Dynasty* (Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1938; hereafter *HFHD*) 1, pp. 99–101.

emperor was thus the final step in the division of land and power among the confederates.

The kings further elaborate this rationale, in dialogue with Liu Bang, stressing that the greatest virtue qualifying his emperorship was his establishment of the kings in order to share the world with them, instead of keeping it to himself:

You, great King, arose from small [beginnings]; you destroyed the seditious [dynasty of] Qin, your majesty stirs everything within the seas. Moreover, ... you acted out your majesty and virtue, executing the unrighteous, setting up the meritorious, tranquilizing and establishing the empire. Meritorious officials all received territory and income of towns; you did not appropriate them for yourself 不私之 ... For you to take the position of emperor would be most appropriate.¹⁹

This principle of “sharing the world” formed the foundation of Han emperorship. It was formally articulated at various places in the text of *Hanshu*, and was repeated in various situations, years before and after the enthronement of Liu Bang, by kings, officials, and the emperor himself.²⁰ Because of these repeated statements, Li Kaiyuan believes that the consensus of “sharing the world” was the foundation of the Han, which he calls a constitutional monarchy and federated empire.²¹ But the articulated consensus, I believe, concealed a great underlying tension that drove the Han from its founding to its fall: to share or not to share.

A careful reading of a specific dialogue, supposedly reiterating the same consensus, reveals a hint of such tension. Four months after Liu Bang took the title of emperor, he held a feast, at which he invited all his confederates and generals to explain why he had won the empire, while the king of Chu had lost it. His officials, Gao Qi 高起 and Wang Ling 王陵, reiterated the same logic of sharing the world: “Your Majesty sent people to attack a city or overturn a region, you thereupon gave them whatever they submitted, sharing your advantages with the world,” whereas Xiang Yu did not give the people who won battles and territories their deserved share of merit and land.²² Hearing this, the Han emperor replied:

¹⁹ *HS* 1, p. 52; and *HFHD* 1, pp. 99–101. *Shiji* has a similar but shorter account, with slightly different wording; see *SJ* 8, p. 379.

²⁰ For a number of statements of the same idea in *Shiji* and *Hanshu*, see Li, *Han diguo*, pp. 133–43.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 246–60.

²² *SJ* 8, pp. 380–1; *HS* 1B, p. 56; *HFHD* 1, pp. 106–7.

You sirs, know a part, but you do not know the whole. Now, in revolving plans in the tent and in making a victory certain at a distance of a thousand *li*, I am not as good as [Zhang Liang 張良] Zi Fang. In pacifying a state, in soothing the people, in supplying pay and provisions and never permitting the communications for food to be cut, I am not as good as Xiao He 蕭何. In commanding a crowd of a million [men], in being sure of victory in every battle, and in taking whatever [place] one attacks, I am not as good as Han Xin 韓信. These three are all outstanding men. I was able to make use of them – that is the reason I took the world. Xiang Yu had one Fan Zeng, but he could not make use of him, and that was the reason he became my captive.²³

These self-interpretations do not by any means document facts, but nevertheless they are indicators of what was conceived as plausible at the time; they suggest differences in understanding that lay beneath the shared consensus. All the men quoted agree that empire was achieved through a collective effort and that the virtue entitling Liu Bang to the emperorship was his willingness to share the spoils of conquest. None of them justified his attaining the imperial title based on hereditary rights, magical power, divine assistance, or the Mandate of Heaven. But beneath the agreement lay hints of great contention. The kings and officials saw the sharing of the empire as the fundamental rationale for Han emperorship; it was, therefore, their essential goal in supporting Liu Bang and their blueprint for the empire they were building. As will become clear in what follows, however, the emperor himself treated this sharing as, on the contrary, a means for his own goal, a way of attracting the greatest talents to help him win the empire.

Such contention is far more evident in the biographical accounts. While in the Annals contained in *Shiji* and *Hanshu*, the above quoted officials describe the immediate reward of land and titles after military victory as the norm for Liu's group, numerous biographical accounts reveal that most such acts of sharing were forced on the emperor as a reluctant but necessary strategy to form alliances, as I shall demonstrate in greater detail below. Was "sharing the world" the logical foundation of the empire or a temporary strategic compromise of the emperor-to-be, aiming one day not to have to share anymore? This tension, to share or not to share, seems to have driven Liu Bang's group to its self-destruction. The following sections demonstrate that before

²³ *HS* 1B, p. 56, and *HFHD* 1, pp. 106–7. *Shiji*'s version has slightly different wording; see *SJ* 8, p. 379.

the enthronement of Liu Bang, the “sharing” principle was used by different participants for very different purposes; after the enthronement, the tension embodied within this principle kept driving the empire into civil wars that eventually destroyed the group and the principle of sharing itself.

THE MERITORIOUS OFFICIALS

Divergent Motives and Entangled Ties

Tensions among members of the group were rooted in their divergent motives and in the multiple relationships that tied them to their leader, Liu Bang. Consequently, they could contradict one another in their understanding of this principle and use it for different ends. Even the same person could be inconsistent in his attitude towards this principle under different circumstances. Such inconsistencies reveal much about how the participants conceived the relationships binding the group into a political body.

One of Liu Bang’s advisors, Li Yiqi 酈食其, once characterized the group as “a motley mob of stragglers.”²⁴ In fact, we know 154 names of “meritorious subjects,” all enfeoffed between 202 and 184 BC,²⁵ plus those of seven confederate kings enfeoffed in 202 BC. Because only a fraction of these people were memorialized as heroes by popular tales and histories, their representation in surviving biographical accounts cannot possibly be all-inclusive, but only partial. In the speech quoted above, Liu Bang mentions three persons possessing the greatest merit for the rise of the Han. While all three could be classified as “military meritocrats,” I would like to use each of these three figures to illustrate a different kind of supporter with a particular relationship to Liu Bang.

The advisors

Several statements exist about Zhang Liang’s motivation for following Liu Bang, and they create a coherent legend of the man, though not a coherent political logic. Zhang Liang represents the type of followers who joined Liu Bang as personal advisors, offering their special talents in exchange for patronage. Like many advisors at the time, Zhang Liang came from the tradition of wandering knights (*xia* 俠), or scholars (*shi* 士). Their primary bond to a patron was the patron’s trust and use of his service. In return, knights were obliged to be loyal to the patron, and for righteousness 義 they would die for him 士死節.

²⁴ *SJ* 97, p. 2693.

²⁵ Hulsewé, “Founding Fathers,” p. 55.

If unappreciated, they would leave with a clear conscience.²⁶ Zhang Liang's forefathers served as counselors of Hann 韓 (the use of two “n”s distinguishes this “Han” from the homophonously named state of “Han 漢”) for five reigns. After the Qin destroyed the state of Hann, Zhang Liang dedicated his life to seeking revenge against the Qin in honor of the Hann kings. He spent his family fortune to plot an assassination of the Qin emperor, and when the attempt failed, he went into hiding as a wandering knight. *Shiji* contains a legendary account of his receiving a secret text of military strategy, which was said to make him the teacher of a new emperor.

When the anti-Qin rebellion broke out, Zhang identified Liu Bang, then the lord of Pei, as his patron and followed him the rest of his life. This was, according to one explanation in *Shiji*, because Zhang believed that “the lord of Pei is probably assisted by Heaven,” since he was the only one who could appreciate Zhang's knowledge and follow his advice.²⁷ Such a comment about Heaven's assistance is uncommon in records of this period.²⁸ One can well question whether this was the true motivation for Zhang Liang's loyalty to Liu Bang, or words put into Zhang's mouth later to construct the concept of the Mandate of Heaven. But regardless of whether the story is historically accurate or not, it identifies a plausible self-perception of Zhang Liang as an advisor to a future emperor, a self-perception coherent with his lifetime career.

While *Shiji* portrays a coherent story of Zhang Liang's life, it reveals a discrepancy in his attitude toward “sharing the world.” In several accounts in the Annals, Zhang Liang is portrayed as the very person who promoted the idea of sharing the world and recommended the most important enfeoffments during the civil war. For example, after Han Xin conquered the Qi (203 BC) and sent a messenger to Liu Bang asking to be titled the “temporary king of the Qi,” Liu Bang was furious and wanted to attack Han Xin. Zhang Liang advised that, at the moment of disadvantage of the Han troops, it was impossible to stop Han Xin from claiming kingship, and it would be better to set him up

²⁶ For a study of the wandering knights of the early Han, see Lao Gan 勞幹, “Lun Handai de you xia” 論漢代的游俠, *Lao Gan xueshu lunwen ji* 勞幹學術論文集 (Taipei: Yiwen yinshu guan, 1976). Among the people who were knights when involved with Liu Bang, I found in *Shiji*'s biographical chapters the names of Zhang Liang, Chen Ping, Zhang Er, Chen Yu, Luan Bu, Ji Bu, Zhu Jia, etc.

²⁷ *SJ* 55, p. 2036.

²⁸ The commentary compiled by Takigawa Kametarō 瀧川龜太郎 lists two other instances of mentioning Heaven's assistance, one by Han Xin after being captured by Emperor Gao, the other by Lu Jia who tried to persuade the king of Yue to submit to the Han emperor, both after Liu Bang's victory over Xiang Yu; see Takigawa, *Shiki kaichū kōshō* 史記會注考證 (Tokyo: Tōhō bunka gakuin Tōkyō kenkyūjo, 1932-34) 55, p. 7.

as the king to keep his loyalty. Liu Bang thus unwillingly accepted Han Xin's request.²⁹ On another occasion, during the determinative final battle between the states of Chu 楚 and Han 漢, Han was defeated and the confederate kings would not follow Liu Bang's call to join him. Zhang Liang again advised that "if your Majesty is able to share the world with them [Han Xin and Peng Yue 彭越], you can get them to come immediately. Yet if [you] cannot do so, the consequence is not perceivable." Following his advice, Liu Bang promised to share the Chu territory with these two confederates if they were to join the battle and defeat the Chu.³⁰ Receiving this promise, Han Xin and Peng Yue joined the battle and brought victory for the Han.

The biographical chapter, however, records an event that presents the contrary attitude, in which Zhang Liang strongly opposed an enfeoffment. In 204 BC, when Liu Bang was under siege by Xiang Yu's army, another advisor, Li Yiqi, recommended enfeoffing the descendants of the six old kingdoms as a way of gaining support and claiming hegemony. Zhang Liang stopped the attempt barely in time, counting eight reasons why this would definitely "ruin Your Majesty's enterprise [of winning the world]."³¹ This inconsistency in Zhang's attitude towards enfeoffment suggests that his promotion of "sharing the world" could only be seen as a military strategy, not as a political ideal or a personal motivation. It was only used to form temporary alliances and secure loyalty of the confederates, purely for his patron's benefit. In a different circumstance, when such a strategy would disunite the alliance, Zhang Liang was the first one to oppose it.

The split between the consensus of "sharing the world" and the personal goal of assisting the future emperor is also evident in Zhang's political position. During his career, Zhang Liang served as the brain behind the rising Liu Bang, navigating him through the winding journey of the civil war and saving his life at crucial moments. But when it was time for the emperor to give him his share of the world, Zhang seemed less than enthusiastic. The new emperor awarded him the noble title marquis and income from 30,000 households. But Zhang Liang himself reduced the award by two thirds.³² A similar disinterest was shown to high offices. Unlike other military meritocrats, Zhang Liang never took

²⁹ *SJ* 8, p. 376; 92, p. 2620; *HS* 1A, p. 46, *HFHD* 1, p. 92.

³⁰ *SJ* 7, pp. 331-32; *HS* 1B, p. 49; *HFHD* 1, pp. 95-96.

³¹ *SJ* 55, pp. 2040-41. Scholars have suspected the number and logic of these eight reasons, but not the fact that Zhang Liang stopped the attempt of enfeoffment. See Liang Yusheng, *Shiji zhiyi*, vol. 3, pp. 1165-66.

³² *SJ* 55, p. 2042; 18, p. 891.

office in the new government and remained Liu Bang's personal advisor. But he understood that his duty had mostly been fulfilled and his advice would no longer be needed in the time of peace. As one of the most important "meritorious subjects," Zhang Liang did not become a statesman of the Han empire. His relationship to Liu Bang remained that of a personal advisor, and his loyalty was based on the sense of knightly righteousness. At the most dangerous moment, when he was about to be killed together with Liu Bang, Zhang told the friend who came to rescue him that he had joined Liu Bang for the sake of the Han king, and it would not be righteous to run away at a moment of danger.³³ This dialogue, conducted in secret, could not possibly be an accurate documentation. But the fact that Zhang Liang did not run for his life and instead used Xiang Liang, his connection in the enemy's camp, to free Liu Bang was a documented merit and accordingly rewarded.³⁴

As illustrated by Zhang Liang, the relationship between an advisor and Liu Bang, therefore, was that of a client and a patron, based on the exchange of the client's service and loyalty for the patron's trust and use of his talent. This relationship required direct access and closeness to the leader's person. Much of the seemingly insignificant and fictional details in *Shiji* reflect this very important reality. One such detail is the claim that when Liu Bang became furious at Han Xin's request to become the "temporary king of Qi," Chen Ping 陳平 "stepped on his toes" to stop him and Zhang Liang "whispered in his ear" his advice of enfeoffment.³⁵ Similarly, when Liu Bang had just ordered seals to be carved to enfeoff the descendants of the Six Kingdoms and was dining, Zhang Liang stepped in for a visit and counted the eight reasons why this enfeoffment would ruin the whole enterprise of winning the world. We read that Zhang borrowed chopsticks from Liu Bang to demonstrate his counter-arguments, and Liu vomited his dinner after hearing the severe consequences his decision might bring.³⁶ These details seem fictional and insignificant for the events. But they create a reality effect – an account that was conceived as true and real for the community of readers at the time – which suggest that the advisors had close contact with and direct access to their patron, and were by his side without much restriction. This direct access was decisive for their profession.

³³ *SJ* 55, p. 2038.

³⁴ *HS* 16, p. 540.

³⁵ *SJ* 55, p. 2042; 56, p. 2056; 92, p. 2621.

³⁶ *SJ* 55, pp. 2040–41.

Such direct access is evident in the account of Chen Ping, another important advisor with a background as a wandering knight. Unlike Zhang Liang, who remained loyal to Liu Bang and did not take up office, Chen Ping jumped ship three times before settling with Liu Bang and did become an important statesman of the new empire. Chen Ping exemplifies the kind of advisors who became the ruler's intimate and trusted subjects 近臣. The key to his rise at each step seems to have been his direct access and close personal contact with Liu Bang. After leaving his former patrons, the king of Wei and then Xiang Yu, Chen Ping came to join the Han. He was first presented to Liu Bang by Wei Wuzhi 魏無知. After he and other newcomers were dismissed from the visit, Chen insisted on talking to Liu Bang privately before leaving. This talk, content unknown, gained Chen Ping exceptional favor from Liu Bang, including a title, gifts, and the right to ride in the same carriage, causing much jealousy from old-timers.³⁷ Later, Chen Ping was responsible for six surprising tactics that saved the life and mission of Liu Bang, yet some of these were too secretive to be revealed. The ones known to the world, recorded in *Shiji*, include making thousands of women dress up as Han soldiers to be slaughtered by the Chu army so that Liu Bang could escape; sowing distrust between Xiang Yu and his most important generals; deceiving Han Xin to capture him; and bribing the wife of the Xiongnu *chanyu* to let Liu Bang escape the siege.³⁸

Chen Ping and others of the time seem to have believed that direct access to the ruler was crucial. At the time of his enfeoffment, he attributed his merit to Wei Wuzhi, the person who had first presented him to Liu Bang, and therefore Wei Wuzhi was rewarded as well. After Liu Bang's death, Chen immediately sought empress Lü's trust and begged to remain by her side, instead of taking up office away from the court. The close personal tie to the ruler finally ensured his rise to the highest government post, counselor-in-chief (*chengxiang* 丞相), during the reigns of emperors Hui and Wen. Because these advisors rose from obscurity after a successful first personal contact with Liu Bang, their first visit and the person introducing them to Liu Bang were considered significant parts of history. Besides the above-mentioned case of Chen Ping, we also learn that Li Yiqi became a key advisor after being granted his first interview with Liu Bang, which was made possible through an introduction by a neighbor's son, a horseman of Liu Bang. Lou Jing 婁敬, a garrison soldier from the Qi, was introduced to Liu Bang by general Yu from his home state, and on his first visit was

³⁷ *SJ* 56, pp. 2053-54.

³⁸ *SJ* 56, pp. 2055-57; 92, p. 2627.

granted a noble title and the surname of Liu.³⁹ Many of these advisors were enfeoffed or rewarded for giving a single piece of advice or promoting a right person. E Qianqiu 鄂千秋 was enfeoffed with the title of marquis and income from 2,000 households because he argued for granting Xiao He first place in the order of enfeoffment precedence, an argument very pleasing to Liu Bang at the moment.⁴⁰ Chen Hui 陳恢, an envoy from the enemy's side, recommended using diplomatic means of conquest and was enfeoffed 1,000 households.⁴¹ Using Liu Bang's own term, these were people who gained office through their "mouths and tongues,"⁴² yet the success of the mouth and tongue depended on access to the ears of the ruler.

The companions

The second type of Liu Bang's supporters is represented by Xiao He and Cao Shen 曹參. These old friends from Liu's hometown formed a strong personal bond with him in his earlier years and became the core of the ruler-class in the new empire, filling the most important positions in the state bureaucracy. According to a story in the Annals, Zhang Liang told Liu Bang that generals were plotting a revolt because Liu Bang had enfeoffed mostly his "old friends" and "those whom he loved."⁴³ Although the story is most likely fictional, it contains a certain verifiable truth. Hulsewé calculates that 40 percent of the 154 enfeoffed nobles were old friends, either coming from Liu Bang's hometown or related to the families of Liu or his in-laws. Li Kaiyuan calculates that old friends from Liu's hometown occupied 47 percent of the highest offices during the reign of emperor Gao and 67 percent during the reign of empress Lü.⁴⁴

Members of this group related to Liu Bang primarily through their lifetime personal bond and shared origin. For them, following Liu Bang was a relationship they were born into, rather than from a choice of patron. Like Xiao He, many of them had invested in Liu Bang during his humble years, being his protector or close friend. Such personal ties were recognized, as Hulsewé points out, in the titles given them upon joining Liu Bang, titles that denote a particular status in their relationship. These titles include, in a hierarchical order, *ke* 客 (honored guests), *zhongjuan* 中涓 (familiars), and *sheren* 舍人 (retainers), among

³⁹ *SJ* 99, pp. 2715-57.

⁴⁰ *SJ* 18, p. 926; 53, pp. 2016-17; *HS* 16, p. 575.

⁴¹ *SJ* 8, pp. 359-60.

⁴² *SJ* 99, p. 2718.

⁴³ *HS* 1B, p. 61; *HFHD* 1, p. 113; *SJ* 55, pp. 2042-43.

⁴⁴ Hulsewé, "Founding Fathers," pp. 55-56; Li, *Han diguo*, p. 158; note that Li's statistics exclude the people whose geographic origin is unknown.

other lesser ones. Hulsewé calculates that in both *Shiji* and *Hanshu* the “Table of the Nobility” mentions thirteen *ke*, including Xiao He and Wang Ling; ten *zhongjuan*, including Cao Shen; and many more *sheren*.⁴⁵ I have also found more mentions of these titles in the biographies of individuals not included in the table, such as those of Lu Wan 盧綰 and Zhou Chang 周昌. These people range from former prominent protectors, such as Xiao He and Cao Shen, to childhood friends, such as Lu Wan and Fan Kuai.

Xiao He had been a prominent Qin official in Liu’s hometown, and Cao Shen the head of the Bureau of Lawsuits. Both of them, as well as other prominent benefactors such as Wang Ling, protected Liu Bang in his early days. At the beginning of the anti-Qin rebellion, they invited Liu Bang, then a head of bandits, to take over the district of Pei. Together with other prominent seniors of the community, they proposed that Liu Bang be the lord of Pei. The stated reason for nominating him was his many bodily portents of future nobility, verified by divination. *Shiji* presents many accounts of these portents, which modern scholars believe to be fictional embellishments added long after Liu Bang’s time. Yet, as many newly discovered texts of mantic practice can verify, belief in magic power, divination, and physiognomy was so widespread at the time, that it is plausible that Liu Bang might have become a group leader based on these beliefs.⁴⁶ *Shiji* also gives an unspoken reason for the nomination; according to Qin law, leading a revolt would cause the leader’s entire clan to be executed and so Xiao and Cao, as Qin officials, did not dare take such a risk.⁴⁷

Following the election of Liu Bang as leader, Xiao He served him as his counselor 丞 and, later, his counselor-in-chief. When Liu Bang’s army entered the Qin capital, Xiao He immediately confiscated Qin books and documents, so that in the following war against Chu, Liu Bang had information about the population and strategic locations of the land. While Liu Bang was fighting on the battlefield, Xiao He governed the Guanzhong and Ba Shu areas, never failing to provide the army with supplies and new soldiers. After Liu Bang became emperor, Xiao He continued to serve as his counselor-in-chief, taking charge of most governmental affairs.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Hulsewé, “Founding Fathers,” pp. 56–61. Hulsewé also points out that while these titles were given mostly to close friends and companions, exceptions were made as political moves.

⁴⁶ Similarly, not only was Liu Bang invited to marry a prominent family’s daughter because of physiognomic predictions, so were Chen Ping, Zhang Er, and Chen Yu; see *SJ* 56, pp. 2051–52; 89, p. 2571.

⁴⁷ *SJ* 8, p. 350.

⁴⁸ *SJ* 53, pp. 2014–19.

Unlike the advisors who depended on close contact with their patron, Liu Bang's companions were soon absorbed into the bureaucratic institutions of the military and the conquered territories, thus forming a clear subject-ruler relationship with Liu Bang and often working far away from him. From the very beginning of the civil war, Xiao He related to Liu Bang as his minister, and unlike Zhang Liang and Chen Ping, whose direct access to the patron was the precondition for their relationship as advisors, Xiao He depended on the institutional relation of the minister to his ruler and worked mostly hundreds of miles away from him. Similarly, Cao Shen also worked away from Liu Bang, appointed to serve from 206 BC to 202 BC as a general and associate counselor-in-chief in the army of Han Xin.

This ruler-minister relationship in the Liu Bang group started from the very beginning of the civil war. In 206 BC, the year Xiang Yu enthroned Liu Bang as king of Han, three central governmental positions of Han were already appointed: Han Xin as general-in-chief 大將軍, Xiao He as counselor-in-chief, and Zhou Ke 周苛 (who was replaced, after his death, by his brother Zhou Chang) as censor-in-chief (*yushi daifu* 御史大夫). There were also second-tier offices taken by people like Cao Shen.⁴⁹ In addition to the military bureaucracy, Liu Bang also needed to appoint commandery and district governors to administer the newly conquered territories that were in the *jun xian* 郡縣 system. For example, Ren Ao 任敖, another old friend from Pei who had been a Qin clerk and then became censor 御史 for Liu Bang, was appointed the governor of the commandery of Shangdang during the war.⁵⁰ During that time, the civil and military positions of the early Han were interchangeable. Former Qin clerks like Cao Shen and Zhang Cang 張蒼 became generals during the war and took up civil offices in the central government afterward. Others, like Xiao He, remained in the same office consistently. Xiahou Ying 夏侯嬰, another old friend, was a clerk in charge of horses for the Pei government during the Qin. He then worked for Liu Bang as his coachman 太僕 throughout his life, holding the same position for four reigns.⁵¹

From the bureaucracy of the military and the conquered territories, occupied by many old friends and trusted bodies, matured the ruler-minister relations and the government of the Han. This may explain why, when Liu Bang claimed the emperorship of Han, his immediate task was adjusting the enfeoffment system and awarding meritorious orders rather than formulating the government system, since such a

⁴⁹ Li, *Han diguo*, p. 156.

⁵⁰ *SJ* 96, p. 2680.

⁵¹ *SJ* 95, pp. 2663–67.

system was already in place and no major change of central administrative personnel was necessary.

Due to their relationship with Liu Bang as subjects, their concept and method of sharing the world were different from those of the advisors. For these companions turned subjects, the concept of “sharing the world” was not a strategy for the patron but an institutionalized reality of their lives. As mentioned earlier, these men composed the large portion of the 154 ennobled marquises, and occupied most of the important government positions. But their sharing of the world was limited to the institutional power of the bureaucracy and noble titles and incomes, thereby differing from the confederate kings. With only one exception, none of these old friends ever became a king.

The confederates

The confederate kings were powerful commanders of their own armies. They were tied to Liu Bang through contractual relations based on the consensus of sharing the world in their own particular way, namely by having him endorse their kingships. For them, kingship was a goal they fought for, rather than a temporary strategy for forming alliances. Unlike the companions, who had personal ties with Liu Bang, the contractual relationship precluded forming such personal bonds and destroyed any preexisting ones. Unlike the advisors, too, who depended on closeness to Liu Bang’s person for gaining favor and trust, the kings needed to be located away from Liu Bang in their own kingdoms. When summoned by the emperor, most of them refused from fear of becoming his captive, as happened in fact to Han Xin.

Enfeoffment had a long history before the Qin and was commonly practiced during the civil war as a means of forming military alliances. It was employed by Chen Sheng, king Huai of Chu, Xiang Yu, and Liu Bang as well.⁵² Liu Bang’s ability to use this strategy tactically, willingly or not, saved his mission time and again. When Liu Bang was defeated by Chu in 205 BC, for example, his envoy succeeded in persuading the king of Huainan, Qing Bu 黥布, to switch sides from Chu to Han, promising that Han would enfeoff him with a kingship and large territory.⁵³ Qing Bu had served as Xiang Yu’s most brilliant military commander and the victorious leader of the Chu army’s vanguard, so his switching sides changed the course of the war. One year later, in 204 BC, when Han Xin claimed the kingship of Qi at the peak of his victory, Liu Bang endorsed it, thus assuring Han Xin’s support. At the final battle with

⁵² For details, see Li, *Han diguo*.

⁵³ *SJ* 91, pp. 2599–603.

Xiang Yu, Liu Bang again used this strategy, promising kingships and more territory to Han Xin and Peng Yue, who consequently combined forces and defeated Xiang Yu.⁵⁴ Han Xin, Peng Yue, and Qing Bu were the three key figures who determined the victory over the Chu, and their support was assured by the promise to “share the world.”

Qing Bu and Peng Yue exemplify this contractual relationship and shared rationale. Both men started as bandit leaders like Liu Bang. While Qing Bu was a defector won over by promises of enfeoffment, Peng Yue wandered between Chu and Han, usually as an independent force, and his alliance was assured only with the promise of a kingship during the final battle with Chu. Neither man ever formed a personal tie with Liu Bang; they exchanged military alliance for kingship and territory.

Han Xin’s case, however, was far more complex and contradictory, and reveals conflicting attitudes toward sharing the world. The initial bond of Han Xin to Liu Bang was that of a knight to a patron, based on the use of his talent. As a wandering knight, Han Xin joined the army of Xiang Liang and Xiang Yu. Finding himself under-appreciated, he switched to follow Liu Bang. His talent was first discovered by Xiahou Ying, an old friend of Liu Bang; when, as an unknown soldier, Han Xin broke a law and was about to be executed, Xiahou Ying, surprised by his words and appearance, spared him and recommended him to Liu Bang. Yet Xiao He was the one who persuaded Liu Bang really to use Han Xin, saying that Han Xin was “a man of the state with unparalleled talent” and “if you hope to contend for mastery of the world, then Han Xin is the only man to lay plans with.” He further suggested that the only way to ensure his service was to offer him the highest military position.⁵⁵ Liu Bang thus appointed Han Xin general-in-chief in 206 BC, on the occasion of their first meeting. This initial encounter established the advisor-patron relationship, in which Han Xin offered his unparalleled talents in exchange for Liu Bang’s trust and use.

At that meeting, Han Xin himself explained – in another long dialogue whose occurrence is unlikely to be a documentary fact – why he chose Liu Bang over Xiang Yu. The top reason was that Xiang Yu depended on his personal abilities 匹夫之勇 instead of using talented people. Although respectful and loving to others, he could not award the meritorious with their deserved titles 婦人之仁. Furthermore, Xiang enfeoffed only his companions and loved ones, causing discontent among

⁵⁴ *SJ* 7, pp. 331–32.

⁵⁵ *SJ* 92, pp. 2610–11; Burton Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian of China: Translated from the Shih chi of Ssu-ma Ch’ien* (Columbia U.P., 1961) 1, p. 210.

the kings and dooming Xiang to become ever weaker. Han Xin therefore advised Liu Bang to do the opposite: to use heroes and knights from all over the world, award the meritorious with cities and towns from All-under-Heaven, and use the soldiers who desired to return to the east to conquer the east.⁵⁶ Liu Bang was reportedly overjoyed to hear Han Xin's advice and regretted not having discovered him earlier.

Han Xin's speech reiterates two commonly accepted principles of the time, which we hear again and again from different mouths, that of "using the talented" and that of "sharing the world." The two principles, however, were not necessarily compatible with each other; the former ensured a pool of talented subjects, the latter facilitated alliances among equals. While both suited the ruler in obtaining support, they contradicted each other from the perspectives of a subject and an equal. The role of a subject was to assist the ruler to win the world, but the role of the equals was to share that world with him while forming their alliance. The value of confederate kings was in their independent or quasi-independent power. When combined to form an alliance with the head of the coalition, Liu Bang, they constituted the force ensuring victory, and no subjects could replace them. But their independent power contradicted the positions of a subject or an advisor.

Han Xin began his relationship with Liu Bang as a talented advisor and his most prominent subject. As an advisor, Han Xin's promotion of "sharing the world" remained a strategy for forming alliances, just as it was for Zhang Liang. As a subject holding the post of top military commander, Han Xin ensured Han victory at every crucial moment in the following years. When Liu Bang was defeated at Peng Cheng and five kings and many generals were switching to Xiang Yu's side, Han Xin advanced like a blade, defeating Wei, Dai, Zhao, and Qi and conquering cities and states one after another. But when he claimed the temporary kingship of Qi in 204 BC, his relationship with Liu Bang changed. The former advisor and subject, who used to promote "sharing the world," now became, as a confederate king himself, a target of this strategy whose alliance had to be bought by giving away a share of the world from his former patron.

The conflicting morals of the conflicting roles that Han Xin embodied led to tragedy and are what make his story bewildering. After becoming king of Qi, commanding the best army and occupying the most strategic stronghold, Han Xin held the future of the empire in

⁵⁶ *SJ* 92, p. 2612.

his hands. In *Shiji* we read long speeches from a Chu diplomat, Wu She 武涉, and a Qi advisor, Kuai Tong 蒯通, both proposing that Han Xin divide up the world into three parts and share it with the Han and Chu. If he continued to support Liu Bang, they assured him, he would be the first one to be eliminated after Xiang Yu's death. But Han Xin rejected their proposal, arguing that Liu Bang had been trusting him deeply and using his advice, and that therefore betraying such trust was neither righteous 不義 nor auspicious:

I have heard that he who rides in another man's carriage must carry his despair, he who wears another man's clothes dons his sorrows as well, and he who eats another man's food must serve him to the death. How could I abandon righteousness merely for gaining interest?⁵⁷

Kuai Tong counter-argued that personal ties between friends or ties between subjects and ruler based on loyalty and trust were not dependable, especially because "your position is that of a subject, yet you possess power enough to make a sovereign tremble and a name which resounds throughout the world."⁵⁸

Although these dialogues again cannot be taken as actual historical records, they pinpoint a conflict in Han Xin's status as both knight and confederate king, a conflict between his moral commitment as a subject based on trust and righteousness and his position as a political equal and potential threat. Such conflict could explain some self-contradictory narratives that have long been suspected as unreliable. Both *Shiji* and *Hanshu* contain biographies of Han Xin that narrate similarly a specific action dated to 205 BC. In that year, defeated, fleeing, and accompanied by only his coachman, Liu Bang rushed into the camp of Han Xin and Zhang Er 張耳, pretending to be an envoy. "When Zhang Er and Han Xin were still in bed," says the *Shiji* and *Hanshu* account, "he entered their bedchamber, seized their seals of command, and with these summoned all the subordinate generals and began assigning them to new posts. When Han Xin and Chang Er woke up and found that the king of Han had arrived, they were astonished. Thus the king of Han seized the army of both men."⁵⁹ In 202 BC, immediately after Xiang Yu was defeated, Liu Bang again "surprised Han Xin and seized his army."⁶⁰ Scholars since the Tang era have cast doubts on these stories. Han Xin's military genius was a central motif of numerous stories, and

⁵⁷ *SJ* 92, pp. 2622–24; Watson, *Records* 1, p. 225.

⁵⁸ *SJ* 92, pp. 2624–25; Watson, *Records* 1, p. 227.

⁵⁹ *SJ* 92, p. 2619; *HS* 34, p. 1872.

⁶⁰ *SJ* 92, p. 2626, *HS* 34, p. 1875.

it was a quality proven by his military achievements and verified by the positions and honors he achieved. But if this was so, how could he twice lose his entire army so easily to a lesser Liu Bang?⁶¹ This inconsistency about Han Xin's military ability remains a puzzle, yet the tension between him and Liu Bang and the conflict between his role as a subject and position as a king were real. Han Xin's case illustrates the conflict between two principles: winning the world versus sharing the world. During the war, the latter was a means for Liu Bang and his advisors to achieve the former, and therefore became a consensus among the confederates. Once Liu Bang became the emperor, sharing the world became a problem and a cause of new wars. The consensus soon began crumbling, and tension between the two principles increased.

From the inconsistencies in the understanding and uses of the principle of sharing the world, we see that the group that supported Liu Bang was composed of people with different, often conflicting interests and roles, and divergent relationships with Liu Bang. All three kinds of relationships discussed were vertical ones linked in different ways to Liu Bang's person, rather than relationships forming a group identity or collective interest. Following, I demonstrate how this particular characteristic of the group led to its self-destruction. After the death of Xiang Yu, the group was to carry on wars – this time against one another – in which new factions rose from the bodies of the old.

THE SELF-DESTRUCTION OF THE GROUP

Following the enthronement of Liu Bang, the history of the group entered a new phase, one of self-destruction. Before the enthronement, the supporters of Liu Bang had worked, for varied interests, towards forming an alliance against Xiang Yu. After the enthronement, the group engaged in a prolonged civil war that dismantled the alliance and eliminated its strongest members. In the seven years that he acted as emperor, the last stage of his life, Liu Bang eliminated six of the seven kings he had enfeoffed, along with some of their generals, the lone exception being the king of remote Yue. The contradictory representations of this process found in *Shiji* and *Hanshu* reveal not a singular process of political unification, but multiple perspectives, conflicting interests, and incoherent interpretations. The tales also reflect much about the nature and culture of the group that produced the monarch and generated its self-destruction.

⁶¹ Liang, *Shiji zhiyi*, vol. 3, p. 1331.

Since the group was formed by various vertical connections with Liu Bang, the members had no clear shared identity, nor a sense of solidarity, as is evident in the relationship among the peers. There were many cases in which officials recommended other followers to Liu Bang, but such recommendations were part of their responsibility to and exchange with Liu Bang, rather than comradeship per se. Because discovering the talented was crucial for the leader's success, it became an important merit by itself that was well rewarded and a popular practice among those who had access to Liu Bang. Liu Bang made it a norm of Han government that "the one who promotes the worthy should be rewarded by the ruler."⁶² The facts that Xiao He promoted Han Xin, Wang Ling discovered Zhang Cang, Sui He 隨何 won over Qing Bu, and Wei Wuzhi recommended Chen Ping were all recorded as major merits and rewarded accordingly. For the same logic of sole responsibility to the leader, the group members could also turn to destroying each other, including the very people they themselves had promoted. There seemed to be very little direct communication, open dialogue, or mutual support among the group members, even between the recommenders and recommended.

The tales about the rise and fall of Han Xin reveal this clearly. As mentioned earlier, Han Xin owed his rise to Xiahou Ying and Xiao He, but right after Liu Bang defeated Xiang Yu, he announced to his court that Han Xin was reported to be plotting a revolt. All the generals, including Han Xin's former subordinates, competed in their eagerness to eliminate him. "Bury the bastard alive!" they reportedly shouted. Liu Bang then used Chen Ping's scheme to capture him by deception. In this episode, Xiahou Ying, who had once saved Han Xin from execution, now joined with Liu Bang to capture him and was rewarded with title as marquis of Ruyin immediately afterward.⁶³ Four years later, demoted and detained in the capital, Han Xin was once again accused of plotting a revolt. This time, it was Xiao He who helped empress Lü to plot his capture by deception.⁶⁴ Xiao He, the discoverer of the military genius, served also as his executioner, and in return was awarded the title of *xiangguo* 相國, the highest position and honor of the state. Both actions were taken on the basis of Xiao He's responsibility as a subject to the ruler and the ruler only.

Not only did the peers lack a sense of solidarity and common interests, they had actively to compete for the favor and trust of the emperor, which determined their individual fates. Liu Bang's group was

⁶² *SJ* 53, pp. 2016–17.

⁶³ *SJ* 96, p. 2666.

⁶⁴ *SJ* 53, p. 2017; 92, p. 2628.

doomed to divide and self-destruct because the rise of some depended on the downfall of others. Hulsewé points out that there were two major motives for ennoblement of the 154 men listed in the “Table of the Nobility.” The first was the victory over Xiang Yu early in 202 BC, and the second was the end of the “rebellions” of several kings who were vanquished in 196 BC.⁶⁵ This observation reveals that the war against Xiang Yu was only half of Liu Bang’s enterprise in becoming an emperor; the other half was the elimination of the kings he had just enfeoffed in exchange for his emperorship. In fact, it was after the capture of Han Xin, not the death of Xiang Yu, that enfeoffment of meritocrats with aristocratic titles began.⁶⁶

During the campaigns against the kings, Liu Bang’s old companions and trusted subjects, many of whom had average achievement in the war against Xiang Yu, rose to eminence. For example, Chen Ping did not hold a high position during the war against Chu and was ranked only forty-seventh in the order of precedence.⁶⁷ But when Liu Bang turned against Han Xin, Chen Ping plotted to deceive Han Xin and captured him unguarded while coming to greet Liu Bang. This scheme removed the greatest threat to Liu Bang, and Chen Ping was immediately awarded the title of marquis. In the campaign against the king of Hann (another Han Xin) the following year, Chen Ping used his scheme to free Liu Bang from the siege, and was further rewarded with the title of marquis of the rich town of Quni 曲逆, with income from 5,000 households.⁶⁸ As Zhang Liang retreated from the political scene, Chen Ping became Liu Bang’s closest advisor and a trusted candidate for subsequent appointment as counselor-in-chief.

In their accounts of the fall of the kings and the rise of new members and factions, the Annals and Memoirs of *Shiji* and *Hanshu* provide many fragmented, contradictory, and ambiguous accounts. From these accounts, we can identify conflicting positions, perspectives, interests, and interpretations. In the “Annals of Emperor Gao,” we read that the kings were revolting one after another with no reason given, and the campaigns against them sound simply like a justified necessity for the empire to survive. The “Annals” states that in 202 BC, only months after Liu Bang’s enthronement, the king of Yan, Zang Tu 臧荼, revolted. Two months later, in 201 BC, there was a report that Han Xin, then newly transferred from the kingship of Qi to be king of Chu, was plot-

⁶⁵ Hulsewé, “Founding Fathers,” p. 53.

⁶⁶ *HS* 1B, p. 60.

⁶⁷ *HS* 16, p. 539. For the order of precedence, see Hulsewé, “Founding Fathers,” p. 47.

⁶⁸ *SJ* 56, pp. 2056–58.

ting a revolt. The following year, the king of Hann was said to be plotting a rebellion in coalition with the Xiongnu. The king of Zhao was demoted in 198 BC for his counselor's plot to revolt, and Chen Xi 陳豨, the counselor of Zhao, did revolt the following year. In the spring of 196 BC, Han Xin, then demoted to the rank of marquis and under house arrest in Chang'an, was accused of again plotting a revolt and was executed together with three sets of his relatives. That summer, the king of Liang, Peng Yu, was reported to be plotting a revolt, and after being demoted to a commoner and exiled to Shu, was executed with three sets of relatives for "wanting" to rebel again. In the autumn, the king of Huainan, Qing Bu, revolted. It was in his campaign against this last rebel king that Liu Bang was wounded, resulting in his death the following year.⁶⁹ The "Annals" presents the perspective from the throne, portraying an emperor exhausted from campaigning against rebels and keeping the empire from falling apart.

The biographical chapters, however, paint a very different picture. While generally considered less reliable as history, they reveal the dubious pattern of these rebellions more convincingly. Notice that even in the "Annals," only three of the eight suspected rebels (Zang Tu, Chen Xi, and Qing Bu) were reported actually to have "revolted," while the remaining five were merely accused of "plotting a revolt." Among these three, no accounts were given for Zang Tu, but both Chen Xi and Qing Bu were first reported to have plotted a revolt, and then, fearing execution, actually did revolt in reaction to the inevitable purge.

The accounts of those merely suspected of plotting against the emperor expose even more about the accusers, evidence (or lack of it), and executioners, casting further doubt on the justifications for executing the kings found in the "Annals." In the case of Han Xin, an unknown informant accused him of plotting revolt, the evidence being that Han Xin traveled in his new kingdom of Chu, leading his soldiers in formation. Liu Bang, in plotting to capture him, entered his kingdom, pretending to be on an imperial tour, and set up a meeting to trap him. Suspicious of such a summons but believing he was not guilty of any crime, he felt no reason to revolt. He went to the meeting with a clear conscience, totally unguarded, and was captured. The second time, now demoted and detained in Chang'an, Han Xin had a personal grudge against one of his retainers and was about to kill him.

⁶⁹ The Annals in *Shiji* and *Hanshu* differ, sometimes, on the precise month of these revolts; *SJ* 8 and 18; *HS* 1B and 16.

The retainer sent his brother to report a rebel plot to empress Lü, who, assisted by Xiao He, once again captured Han Xin by deception and, this time, decimated his clan.⁷⁰ Rewarded for his merit of reporting, the retainer was enfeoffed with the title of Marquis and the income of 2,000 households.⁷¹

Accusations were dubious even when made by high officials. Chen Xi was accused by Zhou Chang, the counselor of Zhao, of attracting too many guests, which he claimed “should be feared” for leading to future rebellion.⁷² In a related case, Peng Yue made emperor Gao furious by not joining him in the campaign against Chen Xi, claiming to be ill. Although terrified by the prospective purge, he refused advice to revolt, but his own coachman, after a personal clash with him, escaped to report that his king was plotting a revolt. Peng Yue, too, was captured unguarded. Complaining about the false accusation, he wept before the empress for sympathy. The latter told emperor Gao that “Peng Yue is a martial man. To exile him to Shu is to lay trouble for yourself for the future. It would be better to kill him right now.” She then “ordered a retainer to report that Peng was plotting a revolt again,” and with verification by the commandant of justice and the emperor’s approval, Peng was executed with three sets of his relatives.⁷³ In the case of Qing Bu, the reporter was a man whom Qing Bu suspected of having an affair with his consort. This man reported that, upon receiving from the Han court a jar containing the dismembered body of Peng Yue – an imperial gift to all the kings – Qing Bu grew terrified and secretly ordered a gathering of troops “in case of emergency.” Once Qing Bu was pressured into actual revolt by investigations, the reporter was made a general.⁷⁴ In most of these cases, the informer was someone with personal enmity toward the accused, and we see little evidence of actual plotting. What we do find evidence of are threats from the court and anxiety among the kings. Such incidental details portray a world of intrigue and injustice, viewed from the perspective of the kings rather than the emperor and challenging the justification for executing the kings as presented in the Annals.

In the destruction of the contractual relationship with the kings, the emperor first tried to replace them with intimate subordinates who had strong personal ties to him. Therefore, besides the few reporters and many others who rose to become new nobility during these cam-

⁷⁰ *SJ* 92, pp. 2627–29.

⁷¹ *SJ* 18, p. 953.

⁷² *SJ* 93, p. 2640.

⁷³ *SJ* 90, p. 2595.

⁷⁴ *SJ* 91, pp. 2603–4.

paings,⁷⁵ the major beneficiaries were the emperor's many friends and companions. As the main force for eliminating the kings, they also filled the power vacuum produced after each purge. Zhou Chang, for example, was one such close companion who, after accusing Chen Xi of revolt, was promoted to censor-in-chief, one of the top three positions of the government. Zhou was later pushed out of office by Zhao Yao 趙堯, a subordinate of his who was ennobled only for following Zhou in the campaign against Chen.⁷⁶

Recognizing no factional boundaries, the same destructive forces that destroyed the kings extended also to the newly rising friends and companions; those who profited from the purge of the confederate kings soon became victims of it themselves. The best examples are Lu Wan and Fan Kuai 樊噲, both of whom began as trusted friends of Liu Bang, rose to the highest positions in the wars against the kings, and then were sentenced as rebels. Lu Wan and Liu Bang were born the same day in families that had been intimate for generations, and they grew up together as the closest of friends. From the outset, Lu Wan followed Liu Bang as his most trusted subordinate and served, together with Liu Bang's brother, as a personal liaison between Liu Bang and other commanders. Lu Wan would go in and out of Liu's bedroom and share his food and clothes, with nobody matching him in gaining Liu Bang's favor and trust. His military merit not being in the same class as that of Han Xin and Peng Yue, he could not legitimately be enfeoffed as a king. But when the first rebel king, the king of Yan, was eliminated, Liu Bang put Lu Wan in his place, the first and last man from outside Liu's family to replace a confederate king.⁷⁷ His enfeoffment was not based on achievement, but rather on the personal trust of the emperor. Once enfeoffed, however, Lu Wan's relationship with Liu Bang changed from that of a close friend to that of a powerful king. With power came alienation, and suspicion quickly grew between Liu Bang and his most trusted subordinate. Seven years later, when Lu Wan was fighting the rebel Chen Xi, he realized that once the kings were all eliminated, he would be the next to go. When someone reported that Lu Wan had secretly contacted Chen Xi, Liu Bang ordered his execution, following which Lu Wan rebelled and fled.

Fan Kuai, the other old friend and a brother-in-law who saved Liu Bang's life at Xiang Yu's Banquet at Hongmen, was the backbone of

⁷⁵ Hulsewé counts that at least 28 people were explicitly ennobled mainly for their contribution to these campaigns; Hulsewé, "Founding Fathers," p. 54.

⁷⁶ *SJ* 18, p. 957; 93, p. 2640.

⁷⁷ *SJ* 93, pp. 2637-39.

most campaigns against the kings, personally capturing Zang Tu, seizing Han Xin, attacking Chen Xi, and killing the king of Hann. When the emperor was wounded and on his deathbed, he entrusted Fan Kuai to execute Lu Wan. But before he could complete this duty, he too was ordered to be executed, on the charge of plotting with empress Lü to kill Liu Bang's favorite consort and son.⁷⁸

From the ambiguous and contradictory accounts in the biographies, the justification for eliminating the kings seems dubious. These accounts reveal the conflicting positions and interests of the kings who became the new target of the campaigns, the emperor who was the initiator of the campaigns, and the subjects who rose to power from the campaigns. They also reflect much about the political culture of the group. The vertical individual ties with the emperor precluded group solidarity or collective identity, leading to the group's self-destruction.

ONE HOUSE, ONE FAMILY

The seven years of campaigns against the kings not only destroyed the kings, they also destroyed the old ties binding the group around Liu Bang and thus the group itself. As a replacement, ancient ties of lineage, marriage, and intimacy were used to restructure the empire, with elements of the old group surviving and rising to become powerful new factions. The world shared became the world of one house, one family – the Liu's. But the political culture remained the same, and the division of infinite oppositions of power continued to revolve around the emperorship, far beyond the death of the first emperor of the Han.

Seven years of campaigns eliminated the confederate kings, and the contractual ties between the kings and the emperor vanished. The consensus of “sharing the world,” once the logic and foundation of the Han throne, became history. The personal ties between the emperor and his close friends, formed by lifetime companionship and service, were also severed; because once friends shared power, they became new obstacles and threats. The same tension also infected the ruler-minister relationship; the great ministers, Xiao He and Cao Shen, had to use methods of ruining their own reputation or playing drunken idiots to avoid being suspected of having too much influence.⁷⁹ Xiao He's biography is mostly about the growing tension between the counselor-in-chief and the emperor. As the most dependable minister of unquestionable

⁷⁸ *SJ* 95, pp. 1657–59.

⁷⁹ *SJ* 53, p. 2018; 54, pp. 2328–29.

obedience, Xiao He was suspected by Liu Bang many times, and was jailed by him for no good reason before Liu Bang's death.⁸⁰

While the contractual and personal relationships with the emperor were crumbling in the consolidation of power, elements of Liu Bang's group differentiated and rose to compete for domination of the empire through access and proximity to the emperor. These included, among others, kinsman, in-laws, and intimate subjects of the emperor. As the confederates and old friends became alienated and were eliminated, the emperor resorted to these new factions in constructing the political structure of the empire.

The lineage of the Liu family had been an early component of the meritorious group. Two brothers of the Liu family had been following Liu Bang since his rise and were in his inner circle. As soon as Han Xin was captured, Liu Bang adopted the suggestion of enfeoffing the kingdoms only to his own brothers and sons. He divided Han Xin's kingdom of Chu into two kingdoms and enfeoffed two of his brothers as kings, while also enfeoffing his son Liu Fei as king of Qi.⁸¹ In the following years, especially in the year before his death (196 BC), he enfeoffed eight more men of the Liu lineage – seven his own sons and one nephew – thus replacing all but one confederate king. At that moment, he could say with confidence that the “world is [now subservient] to one house and is all one family 天下同姓一家.”⁸² In other words, the world was no longer shared by kings of different surnames.

Besides the immediate members of the Liu family, Liu Bang also relied on empress Lü's family and his own intimate subjects. The empress's family had also been part of Liu Bang's original core support, with two of her brothers following Liu Bang from the beginning and being ennobled with the first group of meritorious subjects. Empress Lü herself had been an active participant in the elimination of the kings; as seen earlier, she played a critical role in the executions of Han Xin and Peng Yue. Upon the death of the emperor, the empress's family was to take over the power of the court. At the end of his life, alienated and isolated, emperor Gao turned to his own intimates, using trusted subjects to counter the alienated bureaucracy. One such subject, Zhao Yao, became one of the three top statesmen (*yushi daifu*) purely out of the emperor's favoritism evolving from their close personal contact.⁸³

Resorting to these ancient ties of lineage, marriage, and intimacy did not alleviate the empire's conflicts or the emperor's isolation, and

⁸⁰ *SJ* 53, pp. 2013–20.

⁸¹ *HS* 1B, pp. 59–61.

⁸² *HS* 1B, p. 76; *HFHD* 1, p. 139.

⁸³ *SJ* 93, p. 2640.

he died a lonely man. Just before his death, he ordered the execution of his two most trusted companions in life and worried that the empress might kill his favorite consort and son. His edict to execute Lu Wan reflected the helpless isolation and deep suspicion that had been haunting the new monarch: “The king of Yan, [Lu] Wan, was an old friend of mine, and I loved him like a son. When I heard that he had plotted with Chen Xi, I thought there was no such thing, hence I sent an envoy to escort [Lu] Wan [to the capital. But Lu] Wan feigned sickness and did not come, [so that] it is evident he has planned to rebel.”⁸⁴ The *Shiji* describes the emperor in his last months of his life as wounded, sick, and exhausted. He often cut himself off from everyone and stayed in the bedroom for weeks alone with a eunuch. His brother-in-law Fan Kuai led the ministers and generals breaking into the bedroom, sobbing:

When your Majesty led us, starting from the district of the Pei, and conquered all under Heaven, how magnificent you were. Now the world is in order, but how exhausted you are. You are so ill that your subjects are trembling with fear. No longer seeing us to discuss state affairs, do you plan to end your life alone with a eunuch? Doesn't your Majesty see anything in what happened with [the Qin Emperor and his eunuch] Zhao Gao?⁸⁵

Yet within months, the order for executing this brother-in-law, the last companion left, was issued from the emperor's deathbed, as a desperate attempt to prevent the rise of the empress's power. The brother-in-law was pardoned by the empress after Liu Bang's death.

Although the principle of sharing the world was gone, what persisted were the tensions and conflicts that had accompanied Liu Bang on the long road from commoner to emperor. The use of lineage, marriage, and intimates in constructing the empire did not stop the division of the empire, it only deepened it. The tension between the kings of the Liu family and the emperor's court would develop into the most divisive force for the next four reigns of Han, causing great bloodshed in civil wars in which the flesh and blood members of the Liu family would slaughter one another.⁸⁶

The struggle against empress Lü's family, for its part, inaugurated a long saga of battles between the government and the consorts' fami-

⁸⁴ *HS* 1B, p. 7; *HFHD* 1, p. 141.

⁸⁵ *SJ* 95, p. 2659.

⁸⁶ For the struggle among the Liu family members, see Wang, *Cosmology and Political Culture*, pp. 199–209.

lies. After Liu Bang's death, she controlled power and installed men of the Lü family as kings and holders of key governmental and military positions.⁸⁷ At that time, the old vanguard had died out – great commanders like Han Xin and Peng Yue eliminated, ministers like Xiao He and Cao Shen dead of old age. The surviving, second-tier meritorious officials remained to fight against the Lü family. Zhou Bo 周勃 and Guan Ying 灌嬰 were veterans from the meritorious group.⁸⁸ They played a central role in eliminating empress Lü's family and installing emperor Wen, rising to take top government positions. The deep tension between the consort families and imperial government, however, was to continue through the Former Han, when it was brought to an end by Wang Mang 王莽, a descendant of another consort family.

Liu Bang's reliance on intimates also set a precedent for the later emperors of the Han, indicating another divisive tension of the dynasty. Subsequent emperors perpetuated the concentration of power and the alienation that came with it. The alienation of his ministers that began with Xiao He would become a major divisive force in Han politics. Four reigns later, emperor Wu used the same pool of intimate subjects and personal friends to form the inner court, thus splitting the Han court and undercutting the power of the counselor-in-chief and the bureaucratic government. The conflict between the inner court and the outer court was to continue beyond the Han dynasty.⁸⁹

From multiple voices and perspectives represented in the historical records, from the contradictory self-interpretations and narrative details, we have uncovered much about the group responsible for making the first emperor of the Han. The political realm during the formation of the Han dynasty was constituted by divergent kinds of personal bonds between the followers and the leader. The three kinds of personal bond illustrated were abstractions from many messier, more entangled relationships in reality. As exemplified by Han Xin and Lu Wan, the same person could relate to the ruler in several conflicting roles and relations, often shifting from one to another. All these relations shared one thing in common; they all formed a vertical, personal linkage to the ruler, rather than horizontal linkages among members to form a group unity.

⁸⁷ *SJ* 9; *HS* 3, pp. 395-412.

⁸⁸ *HS* 16, pp. 545, 548; Hulsewé, "Founding Fathers," p. 47.

⁸⁹ For later developments of these tensions into crisis in emperor Wu's time, see Michael Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China: 104 BC to 9 AD* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1974).

The political group had very little shared identity or sense of solidarity. An analogy could be drawn between Liu Bang's meritorious officials and his consorts, the subjects' *yin* counterparts inside the palace.⁹⁰ As subjects of the emperor, the consorts, like the officials, belonged to a group only in a sociological sense, while politically they were one another's worst enemy. Their fate depended on the emperor's personal favor, for which they had to compete among themselves as hated rivals. Empress Lü's brutal murder of lady Qi and her son immediately after emperor Gao's death parallels the execution of Han Xin by his own former promoters and subordinates. This nature of the political group explains why the contractual rationale of sharing the world would quickly be replaced by ruler-subject relations, blood-ties, favoritism, and the inner court.

This political group, a marker of Chinese political culture, also throws light on our analytical methodology. Institutional history has focused on the structural composition of the imperial system, and the first step of analysis has to start from classifying historical agents into groups, classes, or schools. What I have seen in the group is that, in the political culture of imperial China, the internal conflicts of a group were a major driving force of history and beneath the repetitious rhetoric of unity and a persistent imperial system, the composition of imperial power was in fact constantly shifting. If anything really endured, it would be the crisis and conflict that is written all over the dynastic history of China.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- HFHD* Dubs, *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*
HS Ban Gu 班固, *Hanshu* 漢書
SJ Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記

⁹⁰ For an analysis of the analogy and competition between ministers and the consorts of the ruler in an earlier historical period, see Mark Edward Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China* (Albany: State U. of New York P., 1990), pp. 73–80.