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The History of the Former Han Dynasty

**Introduction to the “The Table Of Vassal Kings Of Surnames Other Than Liu”
In the *Ch’ien Han-shu* 13**

{HS 100B:4a} When the Han dynasty first received the Mandate of Heaven,
 The country's later nobles unitedly embarked upon a
 punitive expedition [against the Ch'in ruler].¹
 But the decisions concerning the division of the conquered
 territory were made by the head of the Hsiang
 Clan [項籍, Hsiang Chi, (courtesy name Yü,)]
 Who established eighteen royal clans.²
 The foregoing is recounted in the first Table,
 "The Table of Vassal Kings of Surnames other than Liu."³

{Hs 13.1a} Anciently, the *Book of Odes* and the *Ancient History* recorded that, in the times of Yü and Hsia, Shun and Yü both received the throne through the abdication of their predecessors. {Skk 16.2} By accumulating virtues and piling up achievements, acting in harmony with the common people, {Skk 16.2; Mh III.47, 48} they first acted for others in administering the government, so that they could be examined by Heaven.⁴ Only after several tens of years did they ascend the throne. The kings of the Yin and Chou dynasties came from Hsieh and Prince Millet,⁵ whose descendants cultivated love for others and practiced righteousness for more than ten reigns, until there {Skk 16:3} came King T'ang of the Shang dynasty and King Wu of the Chou dynasty. Only then did King T'ang banish Chieh⁶ and King Wu kill Chou.⁷

The state of Ch'in arose from the deeds of Duke Hsiang (r. 777-766 B.C.) and became glorious through the deeds of Dukes Wen (765-716) and Miu (659-621).⁸ {Hs 13:1b} Dukes Hsien (384-362) and Hsiao (351-338) and Kings Chao-hsiang (306-251) and Chuang-hsiang (250-247)⁹ gradually gnawed away at the Six States [of Ch'i, Ch'u, Yen, Chao, Han, and Wei] during more than a century, at the end of which there came the First Emperor (246-208), who engrossed the whole country. The difficulty of unifying the country demanded virtue such [as that of Hsieh and Prince Millet] and force such as [that of Kings T'ang and Wu].¹⁰

{Mh III.119} When the ruler of the state of Ch'in had entitled himself an Emperor, he was troubled because of the fall of the Chou dynasty, which he considered was due to the "arrogant and selfish discussions"¹¹ of retired scholars, {Hs 13:2a} to the violent struggles among the landed nobles 諸侯, and to the battles with and invasions by the barbarians on the four quarters, so that through weakness the Chou dynasty was robbed [of its royal heritage]. Thereupon he did away with the five marks of landed nobility, destroyed city walls, melted down weapons, gagged people's speech, and burned writings. Within the

country, he exterminated heroes, while outside the country he drove off distant peoples in order to concentrate all authority in the throne, in order to bring about security for ten thousand reigns.

Yet within a little more than ten years, fierce enemies unexpectedly appeared indiscriminately, so that punished frontier-guards¹² became more powerful than the five Lords Protector,¹³ villagers¹⁴ pressed harder upon the Ch'in government than did the barbarians, the echoing of the people to calls for rebellion became more painful to the government than the slandering discussions [so severely punished by the Ch'in government],¹⁵ and courageous calls to arms became more awe-inspiring than mailed warriors. The former prohibitions of the Ch'in government became the means of assisting outstanding heroes and accelerated the suicide of the Ch'in dynasty.

{*Hs* 13.2b} Consequently, the founder of the Han dynasty, without having any official rank that entitled him to possess even a foot of territory, starting from the position of a person possessing only a sword, within five years established an empire – a circumstance never before found in any writing or account. Why? Anciently, when dynasties were changed, it was because the succeeding dynasties all inherited the glorious merits of their respective ancestral sage-kings. But now the Han dynasty merely reaped the results from the injurious practices of the Ch'in monarch who had no sage ancestors.¹⁶ One who engraves metal or stone accomplishes only with difficulty something great, whereas one who pushes over dry and rotten trees easily demonstrates his strength. The situation was thus easy for the founder of the Han dynasty.¹⁷ Hence, he could rely upon the fact that the King of Han (Liu Chi 劉季, later Emperor Kao) had received the imperial mandate.¹⁸

Here there is arranged a table by months of the eighteen kings [established by Hsiang Chi 項籍]. After the unification of the country [in 202 B.C.], matters will however be listed by years. At the end of Emperor Hsiao-wen's reign [157 B.C.], all the vassal kingdoms ruled by persons of surnames other than that of the imperial house, Liu, had come to an end.¹⁹

¹ Wang Hsien-ch'ien remarks that the *cheng* 政 “govern” of the text should be read *cheng* 征 “punitive expedition.”

JLD: {Here and below “JLD” indicates notes inserted by Jack L Dull} The line beginning “The country's...” should read “The feudal lords 諸侯 severally governed. And the next line: ”The institutional arrangement by the Hsiang clan...” There is no reason to accept Wang Hsien-ch'ien's unique interpretation of this passage. Cf. *Hs* 100B.4b.

² The list is that of the eighteen kings appointed by Hsiang Chi in 206 B.C., headed by the Han emperors, in the Table appended to this chapter but not translated here. They are also listed, but in a different order, in *HFHD* I, 65-67, except for Han Ch'eng 韓成, who was detained by Hsiang Chi, was never enthroned, and was killed by him in the sixth

(Chinese) month of the same year.

³This section comes from the verse epitomes of each *Han shu* chapter that are found in *Hs* 100B.

⁴Yen Shih-ku (581-645) remarks that the phrase “examined by Heaven refers to Shun’s examination of the *hsüan*-stone apparatus and the jade traverse, thereby verifying the movements of the seven directors (planets); cf. Legge, *Book of History*, p. 33, verse 5; Karlgren, p. 4, verse 16. The implication was that Heaven’s disapproval would be manifested by untoward movements of the planets or other portents. Yang Shu-ta in his *Han shu k’uei-kuan* (*Hskk*), p. 74, replies that Yen Shi-ku’s explanation is based upon the forged chapters of the *Ancient History* (*Shang shu*), which did not exist in Pan Ku’s time, so that this explanation cannot be correct. Pan Ku’s notion is that Heaven’s opinion is indicated by intelligent popular opinion as stated in *Mencius* 5A.7; Legge, p.357.

⁵For Hsieh and Prince Millet, cf. *Mh* I.174, 209-11. For *chi* the Official ed. (*kuan pen*) of the *Han shu* writes *chi* seemingly without any authority.

⁶For the banishment of Chieh by King T’ang, cf. *Mh* I.184.

⁷For the execution of Chou by King Wu, cf. *Mh* I, 234. Instead of the word now in the *Hs*, *sha* 殺 “kill,” the *Sc* has *shi* 弑 “assassinate.” Yen Shih-ku accordingly glosses that the *Han shu*’s *sha* should be read as *shi*. It is, however, likely that both words should be distinguished here in meaning and pronunciation as well as in script. Ssu-ma Ch’ien adopted the Taoistic and legal attitude (implied in *Skk* 61.9-12) that since King Wu was a vassal of Chou, the killing of Chou was an assassination, i.e., an inferior killing a superior. Pan Ku, however, took the Confucian attitude that since Heaven appointed King Wu as the overlord of China, consequently Chou’s death was a superior executing his inferior.

⁸The commentators dispute where to punctuate among this list of dukes and kings. Yen Shih-ku 嚴師古 and Ch’i Shao-nan 齊召南 punctuate after “[Duke] Hsien.” Wang Nien-sun 王念孫 and Wang Hsien-ch’ien, however, punctuate after “[Duke] Mu” because they believe that the dominating greatness of the state of Ch’in began with Dukes Hsien 獻公 and Hsiao 孝公, who were father and son and so would naturally be mentioned together. Duke Hsien defeated the states of Han and Wei at Lo-yin 洛陰, in 366 B.C. (*Skk* 15.59). King Hsien 顯王 of Zhou bestowed upon on him a special robe. In 362 he again defeated Chin at Shao-liang 少梁, capturing an enemy general. (*Skk* 5.47-8; *Mh* II, 59, 60) The *Shih chi*, moreover, states explicitly that only in the time of Duke Hsien did Ch’in begin to be a power among the other states. (*Skk* 15.3, 4; *Mh*, III, 25.)

⁹In the posthumous name of this king, instead of “Chuang” 莊, the *Han shu* writes “Yen” 嚴, a change occasioned by the Later Han taboo upon the word *chuang*, because it became the given name of the Emperor Ming (r. A.D. 57-75). This restoration of tabooed characters is made in places in *Hs*. Following the Confucian practice that a taboos are removed if the word originally intended is employed, even though the taboo was in force when Pan Ku wrote.

¹⁰For the *chien* 艱 in *Hspc*, there is read *chien* 艱 in Sung and Ming editions of the text.

Yen Shih-ku states that the latter is an old form of the former character. Ssu-ma Ch'ien and Chavannes (*Mh* III.48 n 5) link together Kings T'ang, Wu, and the Ch'in First Emperor as those who had sufficient ancestral virtue and personal power to unify China. Wang Hsien-ch'ien disagrees. It is, indeed, unlikely that the Confucian Pan Ku should have implied such a linkage, even though he uses most of Ssu-ma Ch'ien's words. The translation here is accordingly different from that of Chavannes.

JLD: However, the text is intentionally vague for it gives no names at all, saying, "The difficulty [of unifying the country] demanded virtue such as that of the former and force such as that of the latter." The reference to rulers of the early Ch'in rulers leads me to believe that the appropriate reading should follow Chavannes instead of the very conservative Wang Hsien-ch'ien.

¹¹ "Arrogant and selfish discussions *heng-yi* 橫議" is a phrase from Mencius (*Mencius* III, B, ix, 9; Legge, ii ed., 282). Reference from Ying Shao.

¹² Yen Shih-ku remarks that these "frontier guards sent to the frontier as *che-shu*" (Yen Shih-ku remarks that *shih* 適 is here for 謫 and is pronounced *che* 陟厄反) were people condemned to frontier guard service. They were Ch'en Sheng 陳勝 and Wu Kuang 吳廣, the first successful rebels against the Ch'in rule. Cf. the Introduction to this chapter.

¹³ For the Five Lords (Yen says the 五伯 of the text refers to the 五霸), cf. T.J. Tjan, *Po Hu T'ung*, pp 236, 237. and annotations, especially notes 267, 269. To his remarks there should be added the statement that the original Five Hegemons – or Lords Protector – were those of the Spring and Autumn Period. The later list of the Five Hegemons of the Three Dynasties were almost surely added as a result of Mencius' statement "The Five Lords Protector were criminals to the kings of the three [first Chinese dynasties]." (*Mencius* VI, B, vii, 1; Legge, p. 435), a statement which probably was merely an expression of Mencius' legitimatism, namely that the great kings would have considered even a Lord Protector a usurpation of royal power. This statement was early interpreted by Chinese scholastics to mean that each of these dynasties had its Lord Protectors.

¹⁴ Ying Shao (c. 140-c. 206) notes that these "villagers" were Ch'en Sheng and the like.

¹⁵ Ying Shao remarks "According to the Ch'in law those who slandered were to be exterminated with their three sets of relatives. But now Ch'en Sheng, with aroused bare arms, called loudly to the country and no one failed to respond to his calls for rebellion, which was more painful and violent than the slander."

¹⁶ The interpretation given to *ku* 孤 [JLD: viz., "no sage ancestors"] is that found in Pan Ku's "Continuation of Yao's Principles (*Tien-yin* 典引)," *HHs* Mem. 40B.10a-15b. [JLD. I cannot find the reference to *ku* in the place cited. The passage should read "Now Han has merely received (the results of the) corruptness of the solitary (i.e., unaided) Ch'in."]

{Dubs' interpretation of *ku* appears to be based not on a specific gloss of the term found in *HHs* 40B.10a-15b but on Pan's argument in the *Tien-yin* that the Han, specifically

emperors Kao-tsu and Kuang-wu, are the legitimate successors to Yao. The Ch'in and the Xin dynasties were interlopers. Ch'in was thus an "orphan" *ku*.}

¹⁷ Ssu-ma Ch'ien (*Skk*, 16.3-4; *Mh* III, 49, 50) draws the opposite conclusion, "How can it be that 'He who had no territory cannot become king [of China]?' Was he [Emperor Kao] then one whom the books would call a great sage? How can this fail to have been the work of Heaven? Unless he were a great sage, how would he have been able in such a situation to have received the mandate of Heaven and, indeed, to have become Emperor." P'ei Yin (裴駰, fl. 465-72) in *Skk* 16,3-4, quotes the *Po hu t'ung* (this passage is not in the present text), "If a sage possesses no territory, he does not become a king. If Shun had not met Yao, he would have been like our honored Master [Confucius] who grew old in the Ch'ieh Ward 闕里 [of the city of Lu, instead of becoming king]." For a discussion, see the Introduction to this chapter. {Missing.}

JLD: The sentence ending with note 17 should read: "Such was the situation [regarding the founding of the Han.]"

¹⁸ The remainder of this introduction was probably added by Ma Hsü. See Introduction to this chapter. {Missing.}

JLD: The sentence after n 17 should begin a new paragraph, the first sentence of which should read: "Therefore, on the basis of the fact that Han received the mandate [I have put it first] in arranging the table by months of the 18 kings [established by Hsiang Chi]."

¹⁹ The last of these kingdoms to end was that of Ch'ang-sha 長沙 in 157 B.C. All the others were ended before Emperor Kao had died or at the death of his Empress. See Introduction.