

## The political significance of the Liehou ranks granted by Former Han Emperor Liu Bang: Their institution and revision

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After pacifying the Chinese world during the 5th year of his reign (202 BCE), Former Han Dynasty Emperor Liu Bang (also referred to as Gaozu 高祖) duly rewarded his loyal followers with titles of ranked status, the highest of which was Liehou 列侯. We find items in such ancient chronicles as *Shiji* 史記 and *Hanshu* 漢書 describing the institution of such ranks at the beginning of the period, describing them as the “Liehou hierarchy”; and the research to date on the subject has shown that 1) eighteen such rankings were instituted during the Liu Bang’s reign and 2) in the 2nd year of the Gaohou 高后 era (186 BCE), the Empress Dowager’s Lu 呂 Family regime instituted what is known as the “Gaozu System of Leihou Rankings” (Gaozuxi LiehouWeici 高祖系列侯位次). However, as the result of an analysis of descriptions concerning ranked status in the ancient historiography, the author of the present article adds that the Gaozuxi System was revised during the reign of Emperor Wen 文.

As to the political significance of the establishment of the Gaozuxi System in 186 BCE, first, there was the intention to preserve the 18 ranks set up by Liu Bang and respect his authority, in addition to recognizing the achievements of those who were so honored during his reign. It was in this way that the Lu Family regime planned to obtain the support of Liu Bang’s retainers, implying that such actions as granting feudal estates to the princes of the politically powerful Lu Family was initially met with strong resistance, which needed to be appeased.

As to the revisions made to the Gaozuxi System during the reign of Emperor Wen, motivation similar to the Lu Family may also be cited, in addition to political necessities specific to the Wen regime. That is to say, the Wen imperial regime was formed after the Dynasty’s ministers of state overthrew the Lu Family regime and enthroned Liu Heng, the fourth son of Liu Bang and

monarch of the kingdom of Dai 代; therefore, the revisions were also intended to strip members of the Lu Family of their Gaozuxi rankings, thus legitimizing the authority of Emperor Wen over the defeated Lu Family regime.