

余英時：說鴻門宴的坐次
The Seating Order at the
Hung Men Banquet

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IN THE "BASIC ANNALS OF HSIANG YÜ" in the *Shih chi* (Records of the Historian), Ssu-ma Ch'ien writes:

Hsiang Yü on the same day asked the Lord of P'ei [Liu Pang] to stay and join in feasting. Hsiang Yü and Hsiang Po sat facing east. Uncle sat facing south. Uncle was Fan Tseng whom Hsiang Yü treated as if he were a younger brother of his father. The Lord of P'ei sat facing north, with Chang Liang in attendance facing west. Fan Tseng several times eyed Hsiang Yü, and thrice lifted the jade girdle that he wore as a signal. But Hsiang Yü remained silent and did not respond.

This is the Grand Historian's description of a most exciting and important scene during the Hung Men Banquet. But the "Biography of Hsiang Yü" in the *Han shu* (History of the Former Han Dynasty) contains nothing about this incident, and the "Basic Annals of Kao Ti [Liu Pang]", in recording the Hung Men Banquet, makes no mention of its seating arrangements. As a matter of fact, the Grand Historian's detailed account of the seating order was certainly not a casual one. Concealed between the lines is a message of grave consequences. Scholars before us, in their reading of the *Shih chi*, have paid attention to some extent to the question of seating. The *Shiki kaichū kōshō* 史記會注考證 of Kametaro Takigawa 瀧川龜太郎 may be cited as a basis for discussion. Under the entry "Fan Tseng as *Ya Fu* (Hsiang Yü's veritable paternal uncle)", Takigawa has the following commentary:

Huang Ch'un-yao 黃淳耀 says:

'The ancients esteemed the right side. So ritual regulations regarding the direction of the ancestral temple all provided that it faced south, whereas the occupant of the temple faced east. The etiquette

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concerning the seating of the host and guests was governed by the same principle.

The section "Hsiang yin-chiu" 鄉飲酒 in the *I Li* 儀禮 (Book of Rites) states: When the guests resume their places, they should be in the local school's western apartments facing east.

In the "Biography of Han Hsin", it is stated that the Lord of Kwang-wu sat on the east side and that Han Hsin faced him from the west and treated him like a tutor.

Upon capturing Wang Ling's mother, Hsiang Yü incarcerated her in an armed camp. When Wang Ling's emissary arrived, Hsiang Yü placed her in a seat facing east in an attempt to beckon Wang Ling to surrender.

Chou Po disliked literature. Each time he summoned disputatious scholars to his Grand Marshal's office for mediation, he sat facing east to upbraid them.

The above all indicates that east was the honorable side.

By this token the order of seating at the Hung Men Banquet was as follows: First Hsiang Yü and Hsiang Po, next Fan Tseng, then the Lord of P'ei.

Sekitoku Nakai 中井積德 says: 'At a court of office where upper seat and lower seat faced each other, the direction facing south was deemed honorable. Otherwise, the direction facing east was deemed honorable; no longer was the south side esteemed.'

Although the explanations of Huang and Nakai differ, they both agree that eastward is the esteemed direction. And Mr. Huang's discussion of the order of precedence especially tallies with the actual conditions then existing. From antiquity to the Han dynasty, the sitting mats facing east were deemed honorable. In his essay entitled "Sit Facing East" in *chüan* 28 in the *Jih-chih lu* 日知錄 (Record of Daily Knowledge), Ku Yen-wu 顧炎武 quoted profusely from the classics and histories and reached a most closely reasoned conclusion. Unfortunately, this essay has not been incorporated into the *Shiki kaichü kōshō*. Two recent scholars, Yang Shu-ta 楊樹達¹ and Shang Ping-ho 尚秉和,² have also come to the same conclusion. This, then, is a nearly settled question.

But the section on "Ch'ü-li" 曲禮 in the *Li chi* asks, and answers:

In giving a feast, how should the guests be seated? . . . When the mats face north and south, the west is the superior side. When the mats face east and west, the south is the superior side.

According to this passage, there are then two different kinds of seating arrangements. It comes closer to Nakai's description, and yet there is a variance.

What deserves attention is that there is a distinction between *fang* 方 (side) and *hsiang* 嚮 (direction). If we say that "when the mats face north and south, the

¹Yang Shu-ta, "Ch'in-Han tso-tz'u tsun-pei k'ao," 秦漢坐次尊卑考 in *Chi-wei chü hsiao-hsüeh shu-lin* 積微居小學述林, Science Press, Peking, 1954, pp. 247-9.

²Shang Ping-ho, *Li-tai she-hui feng-su shih-wu k'ao*, 歷代社會風俗事物考, Taiwan Commercial Press, 1967 2nd Edition, pp. 283-284.

west is the superior side," then that which faces east should be the most honored. But in saying "when the mats face east and west, the south is the superior side," are we to understand that facing north is the most honored? It seems that there is a considerable problem there. So as far as this point is concerned, we must leave the question open. From here on, we had better confine ourselves to discussing the significance of the seating order at the Hung Men Banquet on basis of historical examples.

In reporting the polite declination of the imperial throne by Emperor (Hsiao) Wen (then Prince of Tai), the "Basic Annals of Emperor Hsiao Wen" in the *Shih chi* states:

The Prince of Tai faced west and declined thrice; then (he) faced south and declined twice. (Same in the *Han shu*).

The *Chi-chieh* 集解 (by P'ei Yin 裴駟) quotes Ju-ch'un 如淳 saying:

[Emperor Wen was] declining the courtiers' urging. Some say: the seats of the guest and the host faced east and west respectively; the seats of the sovereign and ministers faced south and north respectively. So the Prince of Tai sat facing west thrice declining the offer of the throne. However, when all the ministers present still insisted that he was the appropriate choice, then the Prince of Tai shifted his seat to face south, indicating his change of mind and a gradual readiness to ascend the throne.

This is to say that at the very beginning, when receiving the courtiers, Emperor Wen (as Prince of Tai) insisted on the prescribed rite of a host facing west. Later, he changed direction and faced south. Orally he was still politely declining, but by facing south he had already hinted at his readiness to accept the offer of the throne. From this example can be best seen the ritual occasions which gave the places of honor to the sides that faced east and south. However, Hu San-hsing 胡三省 disagreed with Ju-ch'un's explanation. Under the entry of the 8th year of Empress Kao, in *chüan* 13 of the *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien* 資治通鑑 (Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government), Hu's commentary says:

In my opinion, Ju-ch'un's theory that the Prince of Tai's sitting southward was a sign of his gradual readiness to ascend the throne may not have caught the thought behind his repeated declination. Since the courtiers had arrived soon after the Prince of Tai entered his official residence, he received them as their host. Therefore, he faced west. When the courtiers urged him to accept the throne, he thrice declined. The courtiers then steered the Prince to a seat directly facing south. Again he thrice declined. And so it was not of his own accord that the Prince faced south; rather it was the courtiers who steered him in that direction. How impermissible it is to say that the Prince had suddenly shifted his seat to face south!

西楚霸王



太史公曰。吾聞之周生曰。舜目蓋重瞳子。又開項羽亦重瞳子。羽豈其苗裔耶。何興之暴也。夫秦失其政。陳涉首難。豪傑並起。相與並爭。不可勝數。然羽非有尺寸。乘勢起隴畝之中。三年。遂將五諸侯滅秦。分裂天下。而封王侯。政由羽出。號為霸王。位雖不終。近古以來。未嘗有也。

HSIANG YÜ, 232-202 B.C., self-proclaimed "Hegemonic King of Western Ch'u", lost a golden opportunity to eliminate his arch-rival at the historic Hung Men Banquet and with it the fruits of conquest of the Ch'in Empire.

Mr. Hu's commentary that the southward facing of the Prince of Tai was caused by the steering of the courtiers finds no clear proof in history, but it is an excellent example of a commentary that is rich in historical imagination. With such an explanation, we can see the scene as if it were before our eyes. Compared to Ju-ch'un's assumption that the Prince of Tai had himself moved to face south and again declined the throne offer, this explanation is much more reasonable. Ju-ch'un may have correctly stated what was on the mind of the Prince of Tai, but Hu San-hsing has accurately portrayed the actions of the sovereign and ministers of the Han Court at the time.

The statement, "the seats of the guest and the host face east and west respectively; the seats of the sovereign and ministers face south and north respectively," as cited in Ju-ch'un's annotation, can very well be used to explain the order of seating at the Hung Men Banquet. Based upon the principle that "the seats of the guest and the host face east and west respectively," why was it, then, that Hsiang Yü contrarily took a seat facing east since at the Hung Men feast Liu Pang was the guest and Hsiang Yü the host? This was because at that time (206 B.C.), the struggle for the mastery of the empire was still undecided and both Liu Pang and Hsiang Yü had not yet proclaimed themselves sovereigns. The meeting at Hung Men was con-

漢高祖

漢書高帝紀贊曰。漢承堯運。德祚已盛。斯蛇著符。接幟尚赤。協於火德。自然之應。得天
統矣。



LIU PANG, 256 (247?)-195 B.C., succeeded in lulling Hsiang Yü into complacency in their pivotal meeting at Hung Men and, shortly thereafter, defeated the "Conqueror" and became Emperor Kao-tsu, founder of the Han dynasty.

voked precisely for the purpose of determining to whom the leadership should belong. Unavoidably Liu Pang risked exceptional hazards to attend the meeting in order to show his willingness to accept Hsiang Yü's leadership and to indicate that he harbored no ulterior motive. On Hsiang Yü's part, he had wanted to avail himself of the opportunity to win Liu Pang's fealty. Political considerations with regard to the relative status of the two men made the Hung Men Banquet something more than an ordinary social occasion. In the "Biographies of the Marquis of Wu-an and the Marquis of Wei-ch'i" in *chüan* 107 of the *Shih chi*, there is the following description of how T'ien Fen, the Marquis of Wu-an, entertained his guests:

He frequently summoned guests to drink with him. He placed his elder brother, the Prince of Kai, in a seat facing south, and he himself sat facing east. He considered that his dignity as a prime minister of the Han dynasty should not be undermined by personal consideration and by surrendering the seat of honor to his elder brother.

Takigawa's *Shiki kaichū kōshō* says:

According to the *Han shu*, facing 'south' is recorded as facing 'north'. This is incorrect. The ancients, in seating, considered facing east as the honored direction. So in sacrifices at the ancestral temple, the tablet of the grand ancestor faced east. Even by the etiquette of social-intercourse, the guests also faced east, while the host faced west.

This concrete example enables us to know for sure that on a feasting occasion, the seat facing in the eastern direction was considered higher than that facing in the southern direction. According to the "Biography of Prince Tao-hui of Ch'i" in *chüan* 38 of the *Han shu*, it is stated:

When Prince Tao-hui presented himself at Court on the second year of Emperor Hui Ti's reign (193 B.C.), the sovereign and the Prince of Ch'i imbibed in the presence of the Empress Dowager. Emperor Hui Ti placed his elder brother, the Prince of Ch'i, in the seat of honor, observing family rules of etiquette.

A commentary of Yen Shih-ku 顏師古 notes:

Brothers rank in their order of seniority. They do not follow the rites governing the sovereign and his ministers. This is why the text refers to it as family [rules of etiquette.]

The Prince of Ch'i was older than Emperor Hui Ti.³ So the latter bade the former to take the seat of honor, which is understood to be the one facing east. Even as emperor, Hui Ti observed the order of fraternal seniority; and yet T'ien Fen actually dared to pull his ministerial rank and cast aside the family etiquette governing high and low. It can thus be seen that this seating arrangement is given special attention in the *Shih chi* in order to underscore the overbearing nature of the Marquis of Wu-an. In recording in detail the seating order at the Hung Men Banquet, Ssu-ma Ch'ien had a similar purpose in mind. By occupying the seat of honor facing east without declining, Hsiang Yü had behaved exactly like the Marquis of Wu-an. Both employed their higher political stations as the criterion, but Hsiang Yü was even more strongly motivated by his desire to excel.

During the Han dynasty when superiors entertained their subordinates, they themselves frequently occupied the seats of honor and did not follow the customary etiquette governing hosts and guests. This point is most clearly manifested on stone carvings. In discussing the murals of feasting at Wu Liang's Shrine and Hsiao-t'ang-shan in Western Shantung Province, Mr. Lao Kan 勞幹 touches upon the question of seating. He says:

As to the seat of the host, whether it was on the left or right, the direction does not seem to have been fixed. Since the position of

³*Shih chi, chüan* 8: "The Basic Annals of Kao-tsu" states: "Emperor Kao Ti (Tsu) had eight sons: The eldest, born of a concubine, was Liu Fei, Prince Tao-hui of Ch'i. The second was Hsiao Hui (who became Emperor Hui Ti)"

the murals at the Wu (Liang) Shrine can no longer be ascertained, there is no way to tell whether it was related in meaning to the dictum that in an east-west direction the west [i.e., facing east] was the superior and that in a north-south direction the south was the superior. What can still be discerned is that at the Wu (Liang) Shrine the host's seat, generally speaking, was on the left. As to Hsiao-t'ang-shan, the host's seat, on the whole, was on the right. Could it be that the murals of Wu (Liang) Shrine show scenes of entertaining friends and thus the host took the lowest seat, whereas those of the Hsiao-t'ang-shan are of a different kind? Since in the Han dynasty there was a distinction between a prefect and his subordinates as that between a prince and his ministers, so the prefect's office, in like manner, could be styled a court Now as the three Wus served, respectively, only as Assistant to the Chih-chin-wu ("Superintendent of the Capital"), Chief Officer of The Western Regions (*Hsi-yü chang-shih*) and a Circuit Secretary (*Chou ts'ung-shih*), they actually were subordinates of others and could not have treated others as their subjects. So there ought not to be any doubt that at the banquet (at the shrine) they should have occupied the hosts' seats. As for Hsiao-t'ang-shan, it decidedly was not the site of Kuo Chü's Shrine. According to *Li-hsü*, probably it was the site of Chu Fou's Shrine, or perhaps the Chung family's. If it was Chu Fou's Shrine, then the description would fit, for Chu Fou had been a prefect for a long time. If it was the Chung family's shrine, then, although we do not know now the particulars of that family's official career, we may assume that the Chungs must have been prefects. For only in a prefectural post could the Chungs assume the honored seat and receive many guests who came to pay tribute.⁴

In 1959 there was discovered at Ta-hu-t'ing (Whipping Tiger Pavilion) in Mi-hsien, Honan Province, two Han tombs rich with murals. In Tomb No. 1 was a side-room where on the west wall was a mural depicting a banquet scene. It was 1.53 meters long and 1.14 meters high. The host in this mural (who was also the tomb's occupant) also had his seat on the right side, same as that found at Hsiao-t'ang-shan. Three guests had already been seated on mats. They were seated on both sides of the host (one at a superior position and two in inferior positions). Two other guests were just arriving. In the mural there were altogether four servants, each attending to his own business. One was pictured greeting guests. Moreover, he was shown indicating to the guests with his hand as to where they should sit. Of course, it could not be found out their seating directions. But that the host had placed himself in an honored seat can be seen at a glance. According to research, the tomb's occupant appeared to be Chang Te (styled Po-ya), the Prefect of Hung-nung, mentioned in the note on the Wei Shui (a small river in Honan) in the *Shui-ching chu* 水經注 (Com-

⁴Lao Kan, "Lun Lu-hsi hua-hsiang san-shih—Chu Wei shih-shih, Hsiao-t'ang Shan, Wu-shih tz'u," 論魯西畫像三行——朱鮪石室、孝堂山、武氏祠 *Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica*. 8.1 (October, 1939) p. 100. Prof. Lao

is in error quoting this dictum as he obviously did from memory without checking the original text. See p. 50 for correct wording of the passage from "Ch'ü-li" 曲禮 in the *Li-chi*.



A BANQUET SCENE, depicted in a mural from the Han tombs. Reproduced from *Wen Wu* 文物, No. 10, 1972, p. 62. Please see footnote 5 for further details.

mentaries on the Water Classic). The precise dates of Chang Te still remain to be verified. But archaeologists, on the basis of the tomb's construction, the subject-matters and the contents of the murals, determined that the age of construction belongs to the late Eastern Han dynasty. Since Chang Te⁵ was Prefect, then the guests must have been his subordinates. So in the painting, he was pictured as occupying the honored seat. This painting, then, adds yet an effective and new evidence to Mr. Lao's theory.

The literary and archaeological data cited above are enough to explain that Hsiang Yü's eastward-facing seating at the Hung Men Banquet was a conscious act of political significance. He did not treat Liu Pang as a guest of equal stature; rather, he regarded Liu Pang as his subordinate. There was a basis for Hsiang Yü acting in this way. When Liu Pang first joined the uprising, he once came under the banner of Hsiang Yü's uncle, Hsiang Liang. After Hsiang Liang died in action, Hsiang Yü naturally inherited his uncle's power of leadership; let alone the fact that at the time of the Hung Men Banquet, Hsiang Yü had earned the perfectly justifiable title of

⁵ An Chin-huai 安金槐 and Wang Yü-kang 王與剛: *wu*, No. 10, 1972, pp. 49-62. "Mi-hsien Ta-hu T'ing Han-tai hua-hsiang-shih mu ho pi-hua mu" 密縣打虎亭漢代畫象石墓和壁畫墓, *Wen-*

“The Supreme General to Whom all Feudal Lords Belong.”

But in the seating arrangements at the Hung Men Banquet, the placement of the Lord of P'ei in a “seat facing north” deserves further attention. If according to Ju-ch'un's theory that “the seats of the sovereign and ministers face south and north,” then Liu Pang obviously was formally signifying his intention to become subject to Hsiang Yü. In the chapter on “The Way of Sovereigns” in *chüan* 1 of *Shuo-yüan*, Liu Hsiang records Kuo Wei as having told Prince Chao of Yen:

Now if Your Majesty sit facing east and seek the services of statesmen by giving orders in a haughty manner through expressions of the eyes and countenance and not in words, then what will arrive are men with the aptitude of menials. But if you seek the services of statesmen by holding court when facing south and not neglecting due propriety, then men of the calibre of ordinary ministers will arrive. If Your Majesty face west and treat others as equals and greet them mildly and pleasantly, not taking advantage of your authority to seek the services of statesmen, then men of the caliber of friends will arrive. If Your Majesty face north and seek the services of statesmen in a respectful and humble manner, then men of the calibre of teachers and advisers will arrive. . . . Thereupon the Prince of Yen invited Kuo Wei to take a seat of honor facing south for three years.

Although the story itself may not be believable, what it tells about the order of precedence of seating must have been the customary practice during the days of the Warring States and the Ch'in and Han dynasties (475 B.C.-A.D. 220). Of that there can be no question. From this passage, we can know for sure that Ju-ch'un's theory that “the seats of the guest and the host face east and west and the seats of the sovereign and ministers face south and north” was a general rule at that time. The reason why Liu Pang occupied a north-facing seat and not a west-facing seat was because the north-facing seat was the lowest for a subject, whereas west-facing seats were for friends who treated each others as equals. Although Chang Liang occupied a west-facing seat, the *Shih chi* plainly states that he was “in attendance.” Thus Ssu-ma Ch'ien's account of the rank, sequence and precedence of seating is in strict order. Is this why the pen of the Grand Historian has remained unexcelled thus far?

The *Shih chi* narrates yet another incident that is similar to the Hung Men Banquet. It is recorded in the “Account of Southern Yüeh”, and the story provides us with a basis for comparison. During the reign of Emperor Wu Ti (140-87 B.C.) in the Former or Western Han dynasty, the King of Southern Yüeh was a minor and the Empress Dowager ruled. Southern Yüeh's Prime Minister, Lü Chia, was an elder statesman and a popular figure. Wishing to take advantage of the presence and prestige of the Han envoys, the Empress Dowager plotted to murder Lü Chia at a diplomatic banquet. The *Shih chi* states:

The Han envoys all sat facing east, the Empress Dowager sat facing south, the King sat facing north, Lü Chia, the Prime Minister, and other ministers all faced west, attended, and then sat (on mats)

drinking. (Note: The *Han shu* merely says: "The envoys and ministers were all attended upon and were seated drinking.")

The seating arrangements this time also contained a delicate political meaning. Moreover, they fitted in with the nature of the entire banquet. The Empress Dowager strongly favored the pledging of Southern Yüeh's allegiance to the Han Court. For this reason, she invited the Han envoys (there were more than one) to take the honored seats facing east. She herself was Southern Yüeh's supreme ruler. So she occupied the next highest seat facing south. The King of Southern Yüeh sat facing north so as to signify his submission to Han. This happened to be also the way Liu Pang was seated at the Hung Men Banquet. Prime Minister Lü Chia and other ministers then "faced west, attended, (and then) sat drinking." They were in a completely identical situation as that which faced Chang Liang. The *Shih chi* continues:

After the wine cups were passed around, the Empress Dowager said to Lü Chia: 'It is to Southern Yueh's advantage to submit to Han. But you as Prime Minister have found this painfully inconvenient. Why?' She said this in order to provoke the Han envoys.

It can be seen, therefore, that this banquet was single-handedly arranged by the Empress Dowager. Her idea then was to put on an appearance of submission to the Han Court. So as soon as the passing around of wine cups commenced, she readily and directly raised with Lü Chia the question of "internal submission" that was most distressful to him. Because Lü Chia was the leader of the group that most resolutely opposed the policy of Southern Yüeh becoming Han's vassal state. Quite obviously, at this banqueting scene where "internal submission" was the main theme and where a bloodthirsty spirit lurked, the order of seating had the effect of deciding the basic atmosphere of the entire occasion.

Under comparison with this Southern Yüeh court banquet, we have further reason to believe that the seating at the Hung Men Banquet was specially arranged in order to meet the political requirements at that time. In that case, who arranged the seating? Since the *Shih chi* is silent on this point, we cannot but readily emulate Hu San-hsing and apply a bit of historical imagination. Among the five persons seated at the Hung Men Banquet, Liu Pang and Chang Liang were guests. As such, they could not have taken the initiative to arrange their own seating. Fan Tseng was invited to keep the visitors company; moreover, he was the one who most vigorously advocated the slaying of the Lord of P'ei. So it was also not possible for him to arrange a seat that proved to be so advantageous to Liu Pang. There remain only Hsiang Yü and Hsiang Po. According to reason, Hsiang Yü in his capacity as host was the most likely determinant of the order of seating. A previous writer had suspected this point. In his punctuated commentary on the "Biography of Hsiang Yü", Wu Chien-ssu 吳見思 of the early Ch'ing dynasty said the following under the passage "Hsiang Yü, Hsiang Po sat facing east":

At the time, the seat facing east was the most honored. This

reflected Hsiang Yü's arrogance.⁶

This places the responsibility for arranging the seating on Hsiang Yü himself. But although Hsiang Yü was a rough and ready blusterer, after all he began life as a member of the aristocratic class. His style could not have been like that of Liu Pang, who was haughty and impolite. Han Hsin had once analyzed Hsiang Yü's personality. In the "Biography of the Marquis of Huai-yin" in *chüan* 92 of the *Shih chi*, Han Hsin said to Liu Pang:

When meeting people, Hsiang Yü was polite and kind. His words were cordial and consoling. When others had serious ailments, he wept silently and shared (with them) his food and drink. When people had performed meritorious services and deserved to be raised to the nobility, he toyed with the seal of investiture with his hands until its corners were rounded off. So his benevolence may be compared to that of a woman's.

It is evident then that Hsiang Yü's greatest fault was that politically he was too narrow-minded. But decidedly he was not conceited to the degree of disregarding etiquette. Deducing from Han Hsin's observation that "when meeting people Hsiang Yü was polite and kind," there was certainly no reason why he should himself have occupied the most honored seat facing east and, simultaneously, placed Liu Pang in the lowest seat facing north. Therefore, viewing the background and the entire course of developments at the Hung Men Banquet, we must recognize that much of the credit for the final seating arrangements should go to Hsiang Po for his intercession and mediation beforehand. And behind Hsiang Yü's back, Liu Pang's

⁶Wu Chien-ssu's punctuated and annotated *shih-chi lun-wen* 史記論文, 1967 photo-offset edition, Chung Hua Book Company, Taiwan, Volume 1, p. 58b. His punctuated annotation on the same page also states: "Then Hsiang Yü occupied the place of honor, the Lord of P'ei as guest was seated to his right, Fan Tseng as an associate guest was seated to his left. At that time, the right side was esteemed. Chang Liang as attendant faced the superior side. As (Liu Pang's) attendant, he was also seated. This can be seen by the fact that Fan K'uai (Liu Pang's carriage attendant) was seated next to Chang Liang. The description of their seating on four sides was as clear and distinct as a picture." However, it looks as if Mr. Wu was not informed on a point of contemporary ritual. Mr. Wu was obviously wrong when he thought that the Lord of P'ei, placed to the right, was seated above Fan Tseng. All that is needed to establish this point is to compare it with the description in the "Account of Southern Yüeh" about "the Empress Dowager facing south and the King facing north." As to Mr. Wu's comment about Chang Liang, "as attendant, he was also seated," and his subsequent reference to Fan K'uai sitting next to Chang Liang as proof, it may

also be not entirely correct. Judging from the statement in the "Account of Southern Yüeh" that "Prime Minister Lü Chia and other ministers all faced west, attended, then sat drinking," as an example, it was possible that they had first stood in attendance and then sat down to drink. Although it is not easy actually to differentiate between "sitting" and "attending," but at least there should be a difference in posture. True, "attending" does not necessarily mean "standing." In the Section on "The Ritual Governing the Meeting of *Shih*" in the *I Li* (Book of Rites), there is an essay on "The Attending and Seating of Gentlemen." The same section further states: "When sitting (*tso*) the eyes are trained on the knees." If so, then "*tso*" 坐 and "*kuei*" 跪 (kneel) are close to each other and yet slightly different. Could it be that the "attending" 侍 (*shih*) twice referred to in the *Shih chi* was quite close to "kneeling" (*kuei*)? This awaits further investigation. Regarding the difference between "*tso*" and "*kuei*," see in detail the essay "On *Kuei* (Kneeling), *Tso* (Sitting) and *Pai* (saluting)" in the *Chu Wen-kung wen-chi* 朱文公文集 (Collected Works of Chu Hsi), *chüan* 68.



cunning patience and Chang Liang's clever strategy probably also produced an important effect. Even if we go so far as to say that Hsiang Po, Liu Pang and Chang Liang had had a tacit understanding beforehand about the seating arrangements, such a possibility is within reason. In the light of Hsiang Yü's straightforward and self-conceited nature, this was an ingenious chess move to dispel his doubt and appease his anger. Hsiang Yü in the end agreed that he himself should "sit facing east" and that Liu Pang should "sit facing north." This showed that Hsiang Yü had considered Liu Pang as his subordinate and had formally accepted Liu Pang's expression of submission. Therefore, when the host and guests were seated, Hsiang Yü no longer cherished the idea of killing Liu Pang. In recounting the seating order at the Hung Men Banquet, the *Shih chi* follows closely with this passage: "Fan Tseng several times eyed Hsiang Yü. He thrice lifted the jade girdle that he wore as a signal. But Hsiang Yü remained silent and did not respond." The foregoing discussion of the seating arrangements provides the most plausible explanation of the action described here. Needless to say, Fan Tseng's private signal had been arranged with Hsiang Yü beforehand. But Fan Tseng could not for the life of him have guessed that his murder plot was already foiled so unobtrusively by the other side.

The Hung Men Banquet was one of the most important and, at the same time, most dramatic incidents in Chinese history.⁷ Since Liu Pang managed to escape this confrontation unharmed, from then on he was, so to speak, like a dragon returning to the high seas. Hsiang Yü would never again have an opportunity to exterminate him. After a short period of four years (202 B.C.), Liu Pang finally gained Hsiang Yü's empire. In looking back, we may say that the success and failure of Liu Pang and Hsiang Yü was not decided on the battlefield but was decided at the

⁷In 1957, a batch of Western Han murals was discovered at Loyang (Honan Province). Kuo Mo-jo decided that one of them depicted the Hung Men Banquet. (See Kuo Mo-jo's "Lo-yang Han-mu pi-hua shih-t'an" 洛陽漢墓壁畫試探, *K'ao-ku hsieh-pao*, No. 2, 1964. For an illustration, see "A Report on the Excavation of the Murals in Western Han Tombs at Loyang" in the same issue, pp. 107-125, and Plate 2 in the Section on Illustrations). In my judgment,

although the mural resembles a banquet in a military camp, many difficulties will be encountered if one is to point directly at it and assert that it is a representation of the Hung Men Banquet. I have briefly touched upon this in my chapter on "Han China" in *Food in Chinese Culture*. So I shall not repeat. (See K.C. Chang, ed., *Food in Chinese Culture: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives*, Yale University Press, 1977, Chapter 2, "Han China.")



FEASTING IN A MILITARY CAMP. *This illustration is based on a Western Han mural discovered in 1957 at Loyang. For more details please refer to footnote 7.*

time of the seating at the Hung Men Banquet where the outcome was determined. Liu Pang said to Hsiang Yü: "I would rather engage in a battle of wits; I cannot engage in a test of strength." And Hsiang Yü, when he was about to die, declared: "It is heaven that destroys me; it is not the fault of combat." In so saying, each in his own way had supplied the key to the rise and fall of Han and Ch'u. However, there was this difference: Liu Pang was smiling when he made his remark, and when he did so, there probably floated before his mind the seating scene at the Hung Men Banquet. As for Hsiang Yü, his mind remained muddled up till his death. Consequently, he could only lay the blame on heaven. But had it not been for Ssu-ma Ch'ien's absolutely admirable historiographical pen, we ourselves today at the most could only see the "woman's benevolence" that was revealed by Hsiang Yü at the Hung Men Banquet; we would have no way of knowing how Liu Pang and Chang Liang ingeniously capitalized on the limitations of Hsiang Yü's aristocratic outlook in politics and actually dealt Hsiang Yü a fatal blow even as they were exchanging toasts at the Hung Men Banquet.
