

Historical Commentary on Han Xin, Famous General of the Han Dynasty

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(Clearwisdom.net) Han Xin (?? - 196 BC), a great military officer at the beginning of the Han Dynasty, was from Huaiyin (today's Jiangsu Province). Both of his parents passed away when he was young. Although he was very poor, he studied hard and familiarized himself with military strategy and tactics. He had great ambition and wanted to become an important person one day. Without any source of income, he often had to go to the houses of different friends to eat. Sometimes he went to the Huai River to catch fish and exchange them for money. He was often discriminated against by the people around him. Once, a gang of ruffians humiliated him in public. A butcher said to him: "Although you are tall and big and like to carry a sword, I know you are a coward. Do you dare to kill me with your sword? If you dare not, you have to crawl between my legs." Han Xin knew that if he killed the man he'd have to pay for it with his life. How could he just casually kill a man? His mind was calm; he thus crawled between the butcher's legs in front of everyone. The historical refers to this as: "The humiliation of crawling between legs."

In 209 BC, two farmers, Chen Sheng and We Guang, started an uprising against the corrupt Qin Dynasty. Soon rebellions broke out everywhere in China. Han Xin went to join the rebel army of Xiang Liang, who founded the nation of West Chu. After Xiang Liang was killed in a battle, his nephew, Xiang Yu, became the ruler of West Chu. Xiang Yu didn't think much of Han Xin and only gave him a position as a guard. Han Xin made numerous suggestions to Xiang Yu, but Xiang Yu did not

listen. Han Xin resented being treated this way and left the Chu camp to join another rebel army, the Han army, ruled under Lord Liu Bang.

At the beginning, Liu Bang didn't think much of Han Xin either and only appointed him as an officer managing the food supply. Han Xin realized Liu Bang wouldn't give him any important position and decided to leave again. But Liu Bang's Prime Minister, Xiao He, was aware of Han Xin's ability. When he heard the news that Han Xin had left, he rode on horseback and chased after Han Xin all night to persuade him to return. There is a phrase about this story: "Xiao He pursuing Han Xin under the moon."

Later, after numerous recommendations by Xiao He, Liu Bang discussed military strategy with Han Xin and realized Han Xin was a rare military talent. Liu Bang thus held a ceremony and appointed Han Xin as a senior general.

In May of 206 BC, the Han army won a major victory against Lord Zhang Han's army. Lord Zhang Han's army was based near the city of Hangzhou. The road there had been destroyed. Han Xin openly sent many soldiers to repair the road. Lord Zhang Han learned about it and thus put his guards at ease thinking that the Han army wasn't able to mount an attack until the road was repaired. In the meantime, Han Xin quietly led his troops along an old back road near Nanzheng and surfaced at the town of Chen Cang. Lord Zhang Han's army was totally surprised by the attack and was destroyed by the Han army. Because of this victory, Liu Bang was able to establish himself as one of the three rebel leaders.

In February of the second year of Hangaozu, Han Xin led his troop out of the pass of Hanguguan and marched towards the city of Luoyang. There, he won a series of victories. The Han army eventually conquered Peng, the capital of Chu, ruled by Xiang Yu. At the time, Xiang Yu was engaged in a battle with the country of Qi. When he heard about the fall

of Peng, he led 30,000 highly trained cavalry to return to Peng during the night and defeated the Han army quickly. Han Xin regrouped the defeated troops and joined forces with Liu Bang in Luoyang region. He used the warfare tactics of Blocks and Strikes and defeated Chu's army between Jiang County and Suoting, thus stopping Xiang Yu's army from marching westward. Finally, the battlefront stabilized at Yingyang (in today's Henan Province).

In August, Liu Bang appointed Han Xin as the Left Prime Minister. Han Xin led his army to attack the country of Wei. Wei's Lord Bao stationed a large number of troops along the east bank of the Yellow River. In light of Wei's troop strategy, Han Xin put a large number of boats at Linjin, at the opposite side of the Yellow River, pretending he would attack by crossing the river in boats. Meanwhile, he quietly had temporary equipment built for crossing the river using wooden frames tied together with ceramic vases. The troops crossed the river upstream at Xiayang and made a surprise attack at Anyi. With the unexpected emergence of Han's troops behind Wei's army, Han Xin defeated Wei's army and captured Wei's Lord Bao.

In September of the third year of Hangaozu, Han Xin led troops towards the east to attack Eyu. There he captured the acting Prime Minister, Xia Chuo, and recaptured Dai County. At this time, Liu Bang ordered Han Xin to put his main forces quickly in the Yinyang region to reinforce the area's defence. Thus, Han Xin led only about ten thousand troops eastward to attack Zhao at Jingxing. Zhao's Lord Xie and the commander-in-chief, Chen Yu, put two hundred thousand soldiers at the gateway of Jingxing in the Taixing Mountain region. The Zhao army held the favorable terrain and prepared to make a decisive battle with Han Xin. Han Xin dispatched 2,000 light cavalry overnight to outflank behind Zhao's main regiment. At daybreak, Han Xin lined up the main forces at the edge of the river bank, with the river behind the troops, and lured Zhao's army to attack. Han's army fought with the river behind them. Knowing they were without any way to retreat, everybody fought

desperately. The 2,000-strong cavalry used the opportunity to attack Zhao's battalion. When Zhao's army saw the red flags of the Han army flying everywhere, they panicked and fell into total chaos. Han Xin used the favorable situation to counter attack and defeated Zhao's army of 200,000. Han's troops killed the commander, Chen Yu, and captured Zhao's Lord Xie.

In November of the fourth year of Hangaozu (203 BC), Han Xin used the tactic of Heavy Troops to quickly attack Qi's capital, Linzi. Chu's general, Long Qie, led an army of 200,000 troops to the rescue and met the defeated Qi army at Gaomi (In today's Shandong Province). They faced Han's troops on the opposing side of the Huai River. Han Xin secretly dispatched troops overnight to dam the river water upstream with more than ten thousand sand bags. At daybreak, he sent part of the troops to cross the Huai River to attack Chu's troops and then withdrew, pretending to be defeated. General Long Qie judged that Han's army was timid and sent his main forces to cross the river to attack. Han Xin then ordered his troops to open up the dam upstream and the water separated the Chu's troops in two halves. He then used the strategy of "attacking the enemy in the middle of river crossing" and killed all the troops that had crossed the river. General Long Qie was also killed. The combined troops of Qi and Chu, on the other side of the river, collapsed without fighting. Han Xin pursued the escaping troops and captured Qi's Lord Tin Guang. He conquered Qi's territory completely.

After Han Xin occupied Qi's territory, Xiang Yu was in panic. He quickly sent people to persuade Han Xin to join him and fight against the Han by promising to give him one third of the country. Han Xin refused. Han Xin's advisor, Quai Tong, tried to persuade him: "General, haven't you heard that it is dangerous when one's courage and talent exceed one's master, and that too great a merit will not be rewarded? Your reputation now alarms your master and you have meritorious services. If you join Chu, they won't trust you, and if you return to Han, Han's lord will fear you too. If you do not establish yourself as a lord in

your own right, then what place could you call home?" Han Xin quickly stopped him: "Speak no more. Han's lord treats me with great kindness and favor. He gave me his personal carriage to use. He gave me his clothes to wear. He gave me food to eat. Our forefathers said: 'When you ride in another person's carriage, you will share his worry; when you wear his clothes, you should also share his worry; and when you take his food, you should do your best for him.' How can I see only my own self-interest and forget righteousness?"

Han Xin thus refused to turn against Liu Bang. But Qi's territory had been just conquered and there was a need to establish a lord to govern the country and to pacify the people's minds. Han Xin thus wrote a letter to Liu Bang requesting to be the acting lord for Qi. At first, Liu Bang didn't consent to the request. But after listening to the opinions of Zhang Liang and Chen Ping, Liu Bang made Han Xin the Lord of Qi and ordered him to attack Chu.

In December of the fifth year of Hangaosu (202 BC), the Chu and Han armies faced each other in a decisive battle at Gaixie (today's Binan, Anhui Province). Liu Bang appointed Han Xin as the commander-in-chief. Xiang Yu commanded 100,000 of Chu's troops to attack fiercely at the Han front. Han Xin ordered the midsection of his troops to withdraw slightly and to avoid the vigorous drive of the Chu's troops. He then spread both wings out to carry out a flank attack and then ordered the midsection troops to push forward. The strategy completely surrounded Chu's troops. At night, Han Xin ordered his troops to sing Chu's hometown songs from all sides. Chu's troops lost their fighting spirit and were annihilated at Haixia. Xiang Yu committed suicide on the bank of the Wu River. The five years of war between the Chu and Han ended when Liu Bang conquered the country.

Starting as a lowly guard for Xiang Yu, Han Xin became general under Liu Bang and achieved outstanding victories repeatedly within just a few years. He was the major figure in deciding the outcome of the war

between Han and Chu. Quai Tong praised this all-powerful military figure as: "A rare and brilliant strategist." His principles of maneuvering the troops were highly praised by the later military strategists.

According to Han Yiwenxhi, Han Xin wrote three chapters of *Hanxin Military Strategy*. It's a pity that the book has been lost.

Han Xin's ability made Liu Bang extremely uneasy. After defeating Xiang Yu, Liu Bang seized Han Xin's military command and made him the Lord of Chu. After a period of time he was demoted to the Marquis of Huaiyin and later placed under house arrest.

In the eleventh year of Hangaozu (196 BC), Empress Lu and Prime Minister Xiao He lured Han Xin to the Changle Palace and executed him on the excuse of conspiracy against the state. It is sad to see how a great general of his time was killed.

CATEGORY: Traditional Culture