



**Ancient China and the Peasant Emperor Sources**

**Document A:** Gaodi Emperor, Anonymous. (18<sup>th</sup> Century). London. Retrieved from <http://www.ibiblio.org/chineseart/contents/peop/c01s01p06.htm>





**Document B:** The Warring States of China, Philg88. (2010, October 27). The Warring States of China. Retrieved March 1, 2020, from <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:EN-WarringStatesAll260BCE.jpg>





**Document C:** Han Dynasty, 195 BC, Esiymbro. (2019, November 10). Han Dynasty Kingdoms 195 BC. Retrieved March 1, 2020, from [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Han\\_dynasty\\_Kingdoms\\_195\\_BC.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Han_dynasty_Kingdoms_195_BC.png)





**Document D:** Ancient Chinese crossbow (2nd century BC), Per Honor et Gloria. (2005, March 17). Military of the Han dynasty. Retrieved March 1, 2020, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military\\_of\\_the\\_Han\\_dynasty#/media/File:ChineseCrossbow.JPG](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_of_the_Han_dynasty#/media/File:ChineseCrossbow.JPG)





**Document E:** Liu Bang, from Peasant Rebel to Emperor, Breen, B. (2013, February). February 2013: Liu Bang, from Peasant Rebel to Emperor: Origins: Current Events in Historical Perspective. Retrieved March 1, 2020, from <https://origins.osu.edu/milestones/february-2013-liu-bang-peasant-rebel-emperor>

# Origins

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Published on *Origins: Current Events in Historical Perspective* (<https://origins.osu.edu>)

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## February 2013: Liu Bang, from Peasant Rebel to Emperor

By Benjamin Breen

Abridged and Simplified by Thomas Nitz

“The two most far-sighted and influential political figures in the history of mankind,” wrote the British historian Alfred Toynbee, “are Caesar, who founded the Roman Empire, and Liu Bang, who founded the Han Empire.”

Liu Bang went from being a nobody to Emperor of China in 202 BCE.

As founder of the Han dynasty, Liu Bang also became the “father” of the Han people. One fifth of the world’s population now identifies as “Han Chinese.”

His great rival for the throne, Xiang Yu [2], came from an ancient family of important military leaders, but Liu was nobody. He was born in a small village in the present-day Jiangsu province on the eastern coast of China. His hometown was filled with canals, fishing people, small farms, and it was far from the centers of power at Xi’an [3] and the North China Plain.



Jiangsu province is a watery coastal region, famous for its canals since ancient times. This photograph of the historic town of Zhouzhuang is via Wikimedia Commons.

While his parents were farmers, Liu took and passed the civil service exam— a government test that allowed people to move up in society— and he became a minor government official in his province.

Liu was supposed to take a group of prisoners to a work site, but there were widespread peasant revolts because of the Qin emperor's misrule. Liu decided to join his own prisoners, and became an outlaw and rebel himself.

The story of how Liu won the throne is complicated, and involves many double-crosses between the peasant leader and his rival, Xiang Yu.

The two rebel leaders were friends and allies at first, but their friendship ended when they began to win. When the two were encamped outside the Qin capitol, a tense stand-off took place. The two men and their supporters held a great banquet, where each planned to kill the other.

Liu Bang fled with his army. Four years later, in 202 BCE, his rival killed himself, and Liu took the throne. He was the first peasant to found a Chinese imperial dynasty, and one of the only imperial founders in history from such humble origins.

What is important about Liu today isn't really about his character, his family or even his rule. He was a world-historical figure, and he is important because his time on the throne caused many big changes in later history. The Han Empire pushed into Central Asia, which is usually seen as separate from China. During this time, the Roman Empire learned about China and called it 'Seres[5],' the land of



silk. The Chinese called Rome 'Da Qin [6]'. Liu Bang's rule brought about long-distance trade that started the Silk Road [7], cultural connections and globalization.

**Source URL:** <https://origins.osu.edu/milestones/february-2013-liu-bang-peasant-rebel-emperor>

**Links**

[1]

[http://books.google.com/books/about/Records\\_of\\_the\\_Grand\\_Historian.html?id=Y0utr4s\\_ZQC](http://books.google.com/books/about/Records_of_the_Grand_Historian.html?id=Y0utr4s_ZQC)

[2] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xiang\\_Yu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xiang_Yu)

[3] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xi%27an>

[4] <http://www.centurychina.com/plaboard/archive/3790458.shtml>

[5] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seres>

[6] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daqin>

[7] <http://historymilestones.tumblr.com/post/30324730252/september-a-castilian-in-samarkand-1404>



**Document F:** General Ethnic Composition of China, General Ethnic Composition of China. (n.d.). Retrieved March 1, 2020, from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Chinese-people#/media/1/700914/1013>

