

The Qin Dynasty

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The Qin State & Dynasty

- The Qin state was one of many independent and war-like states that existed at the end of the Zhou Dynasty.
- The leader of the Qin adopted Legalism as his state philosophy, and he experienced success in unifying his state and in conquering other states.
- In 221 BCE, the ruler of the Qin State established the *Qin Dynasty* in China and proclaimed himself *Shi Huangdi*, or First Emperor.



Economic and Social Policies

- Shi Huangdi wanted to break the power of the gentry – the large landowners in China. He seized their land, took some for himself, and redistributed a good deal of it to landless peasants.
- He did this not only to diminish the power of the gentry, but also because often the gentry employed landless peasants to work their land. They then lied about the number of peasants they employed in order to avoid taxation.
- As new landowners and not just laborers, peasants owed taxes to the state, and they also owed a month of labor (per year) to the state. (This may have included army duty.)
- The Qin government also began a program of standardization in China. During the warring states period, each state coined its own money, set its own standards for weights, etc. Shi Huangdi ordered everything to be standardized throughout the Empire – coins, weights, measures, writing, even axle length (so that ruts in the road would be uniform!).



Qin Policies

- Shi Huangdi and his prime minister Li Si worked to establish a powerful central government.
- They implemented a code of harsh and repressive laws, and subordinated the individual to the state.
- In order to prevent any opposition, Shi Huangdi ordered all Confucian books burned, and all Confucian scholars put to death. Hundreds of scholars were buried alive.



Legacy of the Qin

- Since there were millions of peasants who now owned land and owed labor to the state, the Qin set about aggressive building projects.
- They built thousands of miles of roads throughout the Empire – essential for the easy movement of troops to defend the nation. They also constructed miles of canals to connect the river systems of northern and southern China. Again, this was to facilitate troop movements, but they also were used in trade.
- The largest building project of the Qin was the construction of the Great Wall. There were lots of existing frontier walls, but the Qin began an aggressive project to connect them all in an effort to protect China from the nomads to the north. Over a period of almost 10 years, the Qin linked over 3,000 miles of wall. This task cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of peasants, and it has been called 'the longest cemetery in the world'.
- The Qin Dynasty was so oppressive that it is probably no surprise it lasted a mere 15 years. It was overthrown in 206 BCE.

