**3. CH'IN EMPIRE (221-206 BC)**

After nearly 900 years, the Chou Dynasty came to an end when the state of Ch'in, the strongest of the seven surviving states, unified China and established the first empire in 221 BC. The Ch'in empire did not last long, but it left two enduring legacies: the name China and the idea and structure of the empire. This heritage outlasted the Ch'in Dynasty itself by more than 2,000 years. (See Ch'in Dynasty)

The first Ch'in emperor was called Ch'in Shih Huang Ti. The title of emperor was used for the first time in Chinese history to set the Ch'in ruler apart--as the ruler of the unified land--from the kings, the heads of the earlier, smaller states. The construction of massive palaces and the ceremony of the court further enhanced the power of the emperor by inspiring awe in the people.

A centralized bureaucracy replaced the old feudal system. The empire was divided into provinces and counties, which were governed by centrally appointed governors and magistrates. The former ruling families who had inherited their places in the aristocracy were uprooted and forced to live in the capital of Xianyang. Other centralizing policies included census taking and standardization of the writing system and weights and measures.

The Ch'in army conducted massive military campaigns to complete the unification of the empire and expand its territory. The Ch'in empire stretched from the Mongolian plateau in the north to Vietnam in the south. As with rulers before and after him, the first emperor was preoccupied with defending his territory against northern nomads. After waging several successful campaigns, the emperor ordered the building of the wall of "ten thousand li" (a li is a Chinese unit of distance) to protect the empire. This task involved connecting the separate walls that were built by former northern states to form the famous Great Wall. The Ten Thousand Li Wall, as it is known in China, is 1,500 miles (2,400 kilometers) long, from 15 to 50 feet (5 to 15 meters) high, and from 15 to 25 feet (5 to 8 meters) wide. Although closely linked with the first ruler of the Ch'in Empire, the wall as it stands today dates mainly from the later Ming Dynasty.

Ch'in Shih Huang Ti's harsh rule provoked much opposition. The emperor feared the scholars most. He had them rounded up and put them to death or sent them into exile. Many went into hiding. Moreover, all books, except technical ones, were confiscated and burned. In the last years of his life, Ch'in Shih Huang Ti became fearful of threats on his life and lived in complete secrecy. He also became obsessed with obtaining immortality. He died in 210 BC in Shandong Province, far from the capital of Xianyang, during one of his long quests to find the elixir of life.

The Ch'in empire disintegrated rapidly after the death of the first emperor. The legitimate heir was killed in a palace intrigue, and a less able prince was put on the throne. Conditions worsened throughout the empire. In 209 BC, rebellions erupted all over China. Two men had the largest following. Hsiang Yu was a general of aristocratic background; Liu Pang was a minor official from a peasant family. By 206 BC rebels had subdued the Ch'in army and destroyed the capital. The struggle between Hsiang Yu and Liu Pang continued for the next four years, however, until Liu Pang emerged as the victor in 202 BC. Taking the title of Kao Tsu, High Progenitor, he established the Han Dynasty.

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| **Qin Dynasty (221 BC-207 BC)**  **Qin Shi HuangdiQin Shi Huangdi**  Although the Qin is the shortest of the major Chinese dynasties, it marks a transition point between the weak-centered feudal state of the Zhou era and the emperor-centered imperial states of succeeding dynasties. Innovations in the Qin laid the foundation for government structures that lasted, with some modification, down into the early 20th century, ending with the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911-12, 2,000 years later.  When the forces of Qinshi Huangdi, under the guidance of the Legalist thinker Li Si, took control of the Zhou territories, methods were employed to secure control over the realm. Setting himself up as an all-powerful emperor, Qinshi Huangdi’s power was absolute. Hereditary blood-ties were no longer a part of officialdom, and each position in the newly-created state bureaucracy could be filled as if moving individual pieces on a chess board. Local officials were strategically placed in areas where they had no local allies, requiring them to look to the emperor for support. Weights, measures, and written characters (which at the time had many local variants) were also standardized so that officials in all parts of the land could easily read all documents. The widths of cart axles were also standardized so that any cart could run on any of the earthen roads throughout the land, thus increasing the speed and efficiency of transport and taxation. The old states were re-divided into provinces and prefectures until the control of appointed officials, while the ruling families (those that survived) were ordered to the capital to deprive them of power.  Standarize Characters  **Different characters for the word "horse" were standardized in the Qin period. The one on the bottom right is the standardized character of today.**  Other attempts at control included the burning of all but one copy of each of the Confucian writings (213 BC). Though books on technical subjects were spared, more books were lost in the chaos at the end of the dynasty. Thus, much of the early learning was lost, though after the emperor’s death many books were recovered from surviving scholars who had memorized them by heart. Legend also says the emperor ordered several hundred Confucian scholars, seen as subversive to the new order, to be buried alive. Many other stories exist of the cruelty and excess of Emperor Qin.  **Early Great Wall in today's Hebei ProvinceEarly Great Wall in today's Hebei Province**  Hundreds of thousands of farmers were conscripted to work on public works projects, the most ambitious project being a series of walls across the northern frontiers. The tale of Meng Jiangnu, who searches for her husband’s bones along the Great Wall, is one of China’s most enduring folk tales. Conscripted labor also built a massive tomb near the modern city of Xi’an. Five huge armies of life-size [**terra-cotta warriors and horses**](javascript:void(0)) were arranged around the tomb to guard the emperor in death. The tomb itself has yet to be opened by Chinese archaeologists, who wish to perfect their techniques before attempting to excavate a structure that legend says contains a detailed model of heaven and earth, complete with jeweled skies and mercury lakes. After the discovery of the terra-cotta armies in the late 1970s, a huge museum complex has been opened to the public, where hundreds of thousands of visitors can view the excavated remains of China’s first great empire.  **Terra-cotta warriors found in the Qin Emperor's tombTerra-cotta warriors found in the Qin Emperor's tomb**  That empire came to an end soon after the emperor died while on a tour. Legend says that his decaying body was covered with fish on the journey home so that news of his death would not spread. Uprising and rebellion soon followed however, and none of his weak, young successors were able to hold onto power. This ultimately ushered in the rise of the great Han dynasty—China’s first long-lasting empire, based on many of the principles developed during the Qin. |