


Section 1

Shi Huangdi Unites China

Key Ideas

- Qin armies united China and founded a powerful new dynasty.
- Emperor Shi Huangdi united China by standardizing many aspects of daily life.
- Emperor Shi Huangdi created a powerful government based on Legalist principles.

Key Terms • Great Wall • standardize • Legalism • censor

 **Visual Glossary**



Reading Skill Identify Main Ideas and Details Take notes using the graphic organizer in your journal.



A warrior from Shi Huangdi's tomb ▼

The Warring States period came to an end when the kingdom of Qin (chin) unified China. King Zheng (jung) of Qin, who became the First Emperor, is remembered as a leader determined to build a great empire. Although his dynasty lost power soon after his death, later dynasties built upon his methods for ruling a large empire.

Unity Under the Qin

Qin was a mountainous kingdom located in northwestern China. Beyond Qin lay the foreign lands of Central Asia. The Qin rulers built a strong kingdom with an efficient government. By the late Zhou dynasty, Qin was the strongest kingdom in western China. Still, King Zheng, who came to power in 247 b.c., thirsted for more power.

Uniting the Warring States King Zheng was skilled and ruthless. Under his leadership, Qin brought down rival kingdoms one by one. In 221 b.c., Qin forces defeated their last enemy. They had united China. Yet many challenges remained. Languages and customs varied from place to place. Rebellion was always a danger, as was invasion by nomads from north and west of China. The king needed to make the Chinese into one people ruled by one government.

The First Emperor The Qin ruler decided that “king” was too small a title for the leader of such a vast empire. He thus declared himself to be Shi Huangdi, or “First Emperor.” The word “Huangdi” was tied to the gods and legendary rulers of China’s past.

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Defending the Empire Before the Qin unification, the many Chinese kingdoms built walls to protect themselves from other kingdoms. Shi Huangdi had these walls torn down to make rebellion more difficult. Without these walls, local leaders could not defend their territory and break away from Qin rule.

The First Emperor also began work on one of the largest public works projects in history—the **Great Wall**, a long wall running east and west along his empire’s northern border. The purpose of the wall was to defend the empire from nomads living on the vast grasslands to the north.

The wall went up quickly. Already, there were shorter walls along the border. Workers connected these old walls together, making a huge stone barrier. This achievement came at a cost. Building the wall was hard and dangerous. Many died while working on the wall.

The Great Wall did not always keep nomads out. Determined invaders were able to get around it. Still, the emperors of dynasties that followed the Qin also relied on the wall as a way to protect their northern border. Later emperors made the wall stronger, adding towers in key locations along its length.

Uniform Standards Shi Huangdi knew he needed to standardize many aspects of daily life. To **standardize** is to set rules that make things more similar. He created standards that unified China’s economy and culture. Anyone who did not follow the standards was punished as a traitor.

Perhaps most importantly, the Qin government established a single written

language with standard characters.

These characters are the basis of the written language in China today.

Transportation was also standardized. The government established a standard length for the axles of all vehicles. As a result, all ruts made in Chinese roads by the wheels of carts would be the same width. This made travel between different areas easier. All carts and wagons could travel in the same ruts. The Qin government also created a uniform set of weights and measures for use in trade. It produced uniform coins to be used as **currency** across China.

Organizing the Empire Shi Huangdi introduced the concept of centralization, or a central governing system. He organized China into 36 provinces.

currency, n., money, something used for exchange

Standard coins and axle widths for carriages helped connect the Chinese through trade and travel. ▼



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▲ Scholars who disobeyed Shi Huangdi were buried alive. He also had many books burned but preserved those about agriculture and medicine. Why do you think these books were not burned?

Each province was divided into counties. County leaders were responsible to the heads of provinces. Province heads reported to the central government which, in turn, reported to the emperor. The emperor dismissed any official who failed to carry out his policies.

To prevent rebellion, Shi Huangdi forced thousands of noble families to move to the capital. There, government spies could watch over them.

Reading Check Why did Shi Huangdi call himself the First Emperor?

Rule of the First Emperor

Shi Huangdi is remembered as a cruel leader. He believed strict rules were necessary to end the chaos in Chinese society. The laws that he created helped him unite the empire. However, his harsh rule was also one cause of the fall of the Qin dynasty.

A Legalist Government In the late Zhou, the Qin rulers brought in advisors from other kingdoms to help make Qin stronger. Shang Yang (shahng yahng) was one important advisor. He belonged to a school of thought called Legalism. According to **Legalism**, a strong leader and a strong legal system are needed to create social order.

Following Shang Yang's advice, the Qin kings took more direct control over the common people. Heavy taxes and required labor service increased the wealth of the Qin kings. The kingdom became stronger and more orderly. Shi Huangdi set out to extend this Legalist government over the rest of China.

Harsh Laws Shi Huangdi was especially interested in the teachings of the Legalist Han Feizi (hahn FEY zuh). Han Feizi did not agree with Confucianism. Confucius and his followers believed people could be led by setting a good example. Han Feizi believed people must be forced to be good. This could be done by making laws and enforcing them strictly.

Shi Huangdi made a uniform legal code across his empire. Penalties for breaking a law were severe. For example, a thief could face physical punishment as harsh as cutting off the feet or nose.

A less serious theft might carry the punishment of hard labor, such as helping to build roads and walls. Other punishments included execution by beheading or cutting the criminal in half. According to one account, the emperor had 460 scholars executed for disobeying an order. Han Feizi explained the reason for these harsh punishments:

“Punish severely light crimes. People do not easily commit serious crimes. But light offenses [crimes] are easily abandoned by people. . . . Now, if small offenses do not arise, big crimes will not come. And thus people will commit no crimes and disorder will not arise.”

—Han Feizi

Thought Control The First Emperor also tried to control Chinese thought. He decided to **censor**, or ban, ideas he found dangerous or offensive. Censorship took many forms. Debate about the government was banned. People were not allowed to praise past rulers or criticize the present one. The emperor ordered the burning of all books that did not support his policies.

The Fall of the Qin Dynasty These policies were not popular. But they did help create a single nation from China's diverse regions. The First Emperor believed that his dynasty would last forever, but it **collapsed** about three years after his death.

The Qin Dynasty was undone by its unbending enforcement of its harsh laws. A rebellion was sparked by a soldier named Chen Sheng, who led a band of men north to guard China's border. Along the way, heavy rains delayed the band. Chen knew that the penalty for arriving late would be severe. So he and his men decided that they had nothing to lose by rebelling.

As news of Chen's uprising spread, thousands rose up to support him. Qin generals tried to put down the uprisings, but the rebellions spread rapidly. Knowing the punishments for failure, some generals joined the rebellions. The rebels joined together long enough to overthrow the Qin but then began fighting amongst themselves. China again slid into chaos.

Reading Check How did Shi Huangdi try to stop people from criticizing him?



collapse, v. to break down or fall down

Section 1 Assessment

Essential Question

What should governments do?

Key Terms

1. Use the terms *standardize* and *censor* to describe how Shi Huangdi united his empire.
2. Why did Shi Huangdi build the Great Wall?

Key Ideas

3. How did the Warring States period come to an end?
4. What were three things Shi Huangdi did to unify his empire?
5. Why did Shi Huangdi create harsh laws?

Think Critically

6. **Compare and Contrast** How is Legalism different from Confucianism?
7. **Analyze Cause and Effect** What was one cause of the fall of the Qin dynasty?
8. What did the Legalists think the role of government should be? Go to your Student Journal to record your answer.