



0. QIN SHI HUANGDI, the FIRST EMPEROR - Story
Preface

1. YING ZHENG

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This image reportedly provides a likeness of the first emperor of unified China, Qin Shi Huang. He embarked on vast projects like the Great Wall and his famous massive mausoleum with its terracotta army. Online via Wikimedia Commons.

As Ying Zheng continued his conquering ways, still-independent war lords thought of plans to stop him. According to the surviving chronicle, an assassin named Jing Ke (from a neighboring state) was sent to kill him. However ... the plot failed, the assassin was killed and Ying Zheng became more ruthless than ever.

Because of Ying Zheng's unprecedented military success, the country underwent profound changes. For the first time a single state (Qin) demanded (and received) obeisance from its formerly independent neighbors. For the first time one man (Zheng) was in charge. For the first time walls of previously separate states were linked together, then extended, to create a Great Wall. And, for the first time, China had an emperor.

To commemorate his many achievements, Ying Zheng took a new name. Believing his deeds surpassed the accomplishments of prior rulers (such as the San-Huang and Wu-Di), he used both of those names (Huang-Di) to create a new title. Adding Qin (to honor his state), Ying Zheng became Qin Shihuangdi (pronounced "chin sher hwang-dee").

For English speakers, that title is commonly translated the "First Emperor of Qin." The supreme ruler, however, had something else in mind for himself. The literal translation of his new name is the "first august god of the Qin."

As a ruler without equal, Shihuangdi founded the Chinese imperial system and standardized Chinese writing, laws, coinage, weights and measures. To help unify the country, he ordered massive building projects and raised taxes to pay for them. And ... following the advice of Li Si, he imposed very harsh laws, and cruel punishments.

Not everyone agreed with his approach. But when rebels revolted, the emperor ordered that ancient walls (intended to keep out foreign invaders) would be joined and extended. Captured rebels became the wall's construction workers. People who failed to pay their taxes were turned into slave laborers.

Hundreds of thousands of individuals no longer had rights. Instead ... they had brands, on their faces, which permanently identified them as slaves who worked on the emperor's projects.

It was part of Qin's plan, in unifying the seven kingdoms, that everyone should fear the emperor. If people are afraid (so the thinking went), they will commit fewer crimes. If they have branded faces, shame and humiliation will minimize bad behavior.

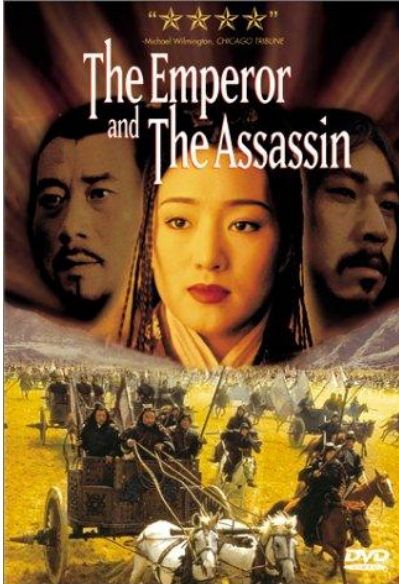
But ... what happens when the emperor dies? Who would hold-back the rebels then?

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The Emperor and the Assassin

Image online, courtesy amazon.com website.

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Qin Shi Huangdi

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Great Wall of China - Purpose

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Mausoleum - First Emperor of China

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