



0. THE EMPEROR UNIFIES CHINA - Story Preface

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Hundreds of years after the life of Confucius, Wu Daozi (who lived between 685-758, during the Tang Dynasty) created this portrait of "The Teaching Confucius." Historians date this work to the 8th century. Image online via Wikimedia Commons.

People in China have been farmers throughout their long history. Archeologists have even discovered rice which was grown during the Neolithic Age.

People who are so committed to their land like to "stay put." To protect themselves from invaders, who wanted to possess what they had, the Chinese people built walls.

To unify his country, the First Emperor became an invader himself. Sima Qian reported that

As a silkworm devours a mulberry leaf, so Qin swallowed up the kingdoms of the Empire.

Once the seven states were joined into one empire, the new ruler ordered that a wall measuring thirty-two feet high, and fifteen feet wide, would be built to keep out all foreigners. In twelve years, suffering workers gave Qin what he wanted: a wall extending roughly the distance between New York and California.

Inside the empire, Qin demanded much from his subjects. He even tried to change the way people viewed their lives and their history.

Confucius, for example, was a major figure in Chinese history before Ying Zheng was born. His teachings, dating from the 5th century BC, were closely studied long before the First Emperor rose to power, and Confucian philosophy was highly influential. But the Confucian approach to life and morality was inconsistent with the emperor's desire for unity and order.

While the emperor's soldiers and officials generated fear in every corner of the land, Confucian scholars taught that a ruler should persuasively govern with wisdom and moral authority. Qin responded (whether on advice or through his own judgment) by ordering the destruction of all Confucian writings except for those in his own library. History books were also burned in an effort to eliminate the past from the new nation's present and future.

Criticism was crushed, including scholarly dissent. In a crime which is still an issue for many in China, the First Emperor ordered the arrest and execution of 460 Confucian scholars. At the time, a common form of execution was burying someone alive. According to *The Records of the Grand Historian*, that was also the fate of those Confucian disciples. Other dissenters were also killed, their severed heads put on display, and even Qin's own family did not escape his tyranny.

Soon fear no longer served as a deterrent for the emperor's subjects. Too many people were dead or taken from their families to serve as slaves. Too much blood had been wasted. Rebellions sprang up in every province. Remembering the assassination attempt, the First Emperor began to fear for his own life.

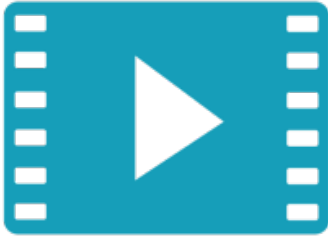
Would the Great Wall of China protect him, personally, as it had protected his empire?

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

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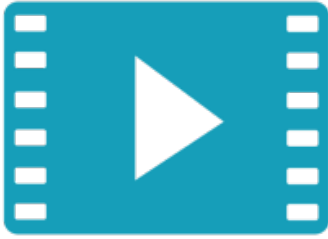


Silkworms Gobbling Mulberry Leaves

Video online, courtesy YouTube.

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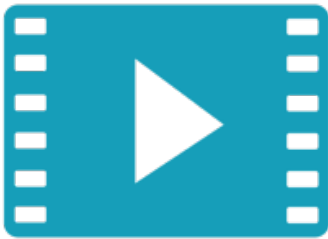


First Emperor of China - Death and Human Suffering

Clip from, *Secrets of the First Emperor* by Koch Vision.

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Secrets of the Great Wall - Suffering Workers

Video clip, from *Secrets of the Great Wall* (2000), broadcast by the Discovery Channel.

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