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Routledge Handbook of Imperial Chinese History

Edited by Victor Cunrui Xiong and
Kenneth J. Hammond

ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF IMPERIAL CHINESE HISTORY

The resurgence of modern China has generated much interest, not only in the country's present day activities, but also in its long history. As the only uninterrupted ancient civilization still alive today, the study of China's past promises to offer invaluable insights into understanding contemporary China.

Providing coverage of the entire Imperial era (221 BCE–1912 CE), this handbook takes a chronological approach. It includes comprehensive analysis of all major periods, from the powerful Han empire, which rivalled Rome, and the crucial transformative period of the Five Dynasties, to the prosperous Ming era and the later dominance of the non-Han peoples. With contributions from a team of international authors, key themes include:

- Political events and leadership
- Religion and philosophy
- Cultural and literary achievements
- Legal, economic, and military institutions

This book transcends the traditional boundaries of historiography, giving special attention to the role of archaeology. As such, the *Routledge Handbook of Imperial Chinese History* is an indispensable reference work for students and scholars of Chinese, Asian, and World History.

Victor Cunrui Xiong is Professor of History at Western Michigan University, USA. His recent publications include *From Peasant to Emperor: The Life of Liu Bang* (2018) and *Luoyang: A Study of Capital Cities and Urban Form in Pre-modern China, 1038 BCE to 938 CE* (2016).

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Kenneth J. Hammond*

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INTRODUCTION

After decades of economic reform, China has become an economic powerhouse, challenging the dominance of the United States as the world's largest economy. The resurgence of China has generated much interest not only in the present conditions of that country, but also in her past. Since China is the only uninterrupted ancient civilization that is still living today, the study of her past can be inherently rewarding, and offers tremendous benefit to anyone who wants to gain an in-depth understanding of her present.

Perhaps more than anywhere else, in China, the present is intricately linked with the past. Take Mao Zedong 毛澤東, the founder of the PRC, for example. When China was attempting to take on the United States and the USSR in the late 1960s, he issued a call to his people: “Dig tunnels deep, store grain extensively, and do not seek hegemony.” This call is actually modeled on the slogan, “Build walls high, store grain extensively, and put off claiming the throne,” which emanated from Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋, the rebel leader who founded the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). Before his death, Mao commented on his heir Hua Guofeng 華國鋒 as someone who was “respectful and loyal but lacks refinements” and “could pacify the world.” Mao here was paraphrasing Liu Bang 劉邦 (r. 202–195 BCE), who said similar things about one of his potential successors Zhou Bo 周勃.

Obviously it may not be too difficult to make the case about the importance of Chinese history. However, anyone engaged in studying it may find themselves confronted with daunting challenges: the heritage is too long; the geographic area is too vast; and the language is too difficult. This is particularly true of the Imperial era. This volume, *Routledge Handbook of Imperial Chinese History* (hereinafter *Handbook*), attempts to address these issues, with a particular focus on recent research trends in the field.

As is indicated by the title, the *Handbook* gives coverage to the entire Imperial era of more than 2200 years (221 BCE–1912 CE). It consists of two parts: Early Imperial and Late Imperial in a total of 18 chronologically chapters and two thematic chapters. Each chronological chapter deals with such key areas as politics, the history of ideas, the economy, the military, religion, and others.

The *Handbook* is intended for those in the West who want to acquire a better knowledge of the Imperial era of China. Specifically, it can be used by college undergraduates studying Imperial Chinese history in class or on their own; it may appeal to graduate students and scholars specializing in a given period of Chinese history who are interested in broadening their scope of study; and lastly, it may be a helpful tool for educated laymen who want to explore Chinese history in general.

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PART I

Early Imperial China (Qin–Five Dynasties)



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SECTION 1

The Qin-Han Empire

In 221 BCE, Ying Zheng 嬴政, king of the state of Qin, upon unifying the realm, declared himself *huangdi* 皇帝 (august emperor; known as the First Emperor in history), creating the first ever imperial dynasty in Chinese history. Not long after the death of the First Emperor (210 BCE), the mighty empire began to fall apart. Traditionalists, especially the Han scholars, faulted the tyrannical rulership of the Qin emperors as the root cause for the downfall, and the Qin became a poster-child for evil government.

Recent scholarship based on excavated materials has shed light on the existence of a relatively well-regulated Qin society with its cultus that seems to have escaped the attention of the Han scholars. Although it should by no means exonerate the First Emperor for the drastic actions he took, including the burning of the books, the execution of the scholars, and the building of costly public works, it does show that Qin history is necessarily much more nuanced than the traditionalists would have us believe.

Following the fall of the Qin, the Han empire, the first part of which was based in Chang'an 長安 in the Wei valley, arose to coincide, apart from a brief interruption, with the last two centuries of the Roman Republic and the first two centuries of the Roman Empire. While condemning the harsh Legalist (*fajia* 法家) rule of the previous regime, the Han leadership retained much of the Qin government system. The early Han sovereigns such as Emperors Gaozu (Liu Bang 劉邦), Wen 文, and Jing 景 adopted a Daoist governing philosophy. But Emperor Wu 武帝, Jing's successor, made Confucianism (*rujia* 儒家) the state ideology, a tradition that would live on for the next two millennia. In the Eastern Han, the second half of the Han empire arose following the Xin interregnum, and the capital was set up in Luoyang 洛陽 to the east in the Central Plains. Throughout this period, Confucianism was in ascendancy. In the second century, the first Daoist religion debuted as the Way of Five Pecks of Rice (*wudou mi dao* 五斗米道). At court, two powerful groups, the *waiqi* 外戚 (consort relatives) and the eunuchs, competed for control of the throne. Following the outbreak of a Daoist-inspired Yellow Turban rebellion (184), regional military commanders emerged as the new power-holders, whose struggle for dominance tore China asunder.

Chronology 1: Qin–Eastern Han

770 BCE: The Qin (based in Shaanxi) sovereign enfeoffed as Duke, posthumously known as Duke of Xiang of Qin 秦襄公.

- 359–338 Shang Yang 商鞅 carries out reforms under Duke Xiao of Qin 秦孝公.
 350 Qin moves its capital to Xianyang 咸陽 (at Xi'an, Shaanxi).
 284 Five states invade Qi (based in Shandong) and sacks its capital; Qi begins to decline.
 278 Invaded by Qin, Chu (based in Hubei and Hunan) moves its capital to Chen 陳 (Huaiyang, Henan).
 256 The last Eastern Zhou king Nan 赧 dies; the Eastern Zhou dynasty ends.
 230 Hann 韓 (based in Henan and Shanxi) is conquered by Qin.
 225 Wei 魏 (based in Henan and Hebei) is conquered by Qin.
 223 Chu is conquered by Qin.
 222 Yan (based in Hebei and Liaoning) and Zhao (based in Hebei) are conquered by Qin.
- 221–207 Qin dynasty**
- 221 Qi is conquered by Qin. The First Emperor, the unifier of China, founds the Qin dynasty; standardizes the currency; divides the realm into 36 *jun* (commanderies; more will be added later).
 214 Qin dislodges the Xiongnu from Henandi 河南地 (the Ordos Loop, Inner Mongolia) and builds the Great Wall.
 213 The First Emperor orders the burning of books.
 212 The First Emperor orders a large labor force to build palaces in Guanzhong 關中 and elsewhere, among which the Epang 阿房 Palace (in Xi'an) is the most famous; and executes 460-plus scholars.
 210 The First Emperor dies. His son Huhai 胡亥 is placed on the throne by Li Si 李斯 and Zhao Gao 趙高. Prince Fusu 扶蘇 is ordered to commit suicide.
 209 Chen Sheng 陳勝 and Wu Guang 吳廣, two peasant farmers, rebel; Chen declares himself king. Liu Bang 劉邦 rebels in north Jiangsu; Xiang Yu 項羽 (Xiang Ji 項籍) and his uncle rebel in south Jiangsu.
 207 Liu Bang enters Xianyang; the Qin falls.
 206 Xiang Yu has emerged as the first among equals. He enfeoffs various warlords as kings, including Liu Bang as the King of Han.
 206–202 The post-Qin War between Liu Bang and Xiang Yu.
- 202 BCE–8 CE Western Han dynasty**
- 202 BCE Liu Bang (Gaozu of Han) founds the (Western) Han dynasty with Chang'an (Xi'an) as its capital.
 200 Liu Bang is nearly captured by the Xiongnu near Pingcheng 平城 (Datong, Shanxi). The Han adopts an appeasement policy toward the Xiongnu.
 195 Liu Bang dies. Power is now in the hands of Empress Lü 呂后.
 183 King of Nanyue 南越 (Guangdong, Guangxi, northern Vietnam) Zhao Tuo 趙佗 declares himself emperor.
 180 Empress Lü dies. Male members of her clan are purged. Emperor Wen 文帝 succeeds. During his and his successor Emperor Jing's reigns, the Han implements a policy of "non-action," with low taxes and little government interference in the economy.
 157 Emperor Wen dies, succeeded by Emperor Jing 景帝. Emperor Jing will adopt the proposal from his top adviser Chao Cuo 晁錯 to reduce the size and power of the feudatories.

- 154 Chao Cuo is executed. The rebellion of the Seven Kingdoms (headed by the kings of Wu and Chu) begins and ends in the same year.
- 141 Emperor Jing dies, succeeded by Emperor Wu, who will make Confucianism the state ideology.
- 139–126 Zhang Qian's 張騫 first mission to the Western Regions.
- 133–71 The Han-Xiongnu War. Emperor Wu abandons the appeasement policy toward Xiongnu. The Han army defeats the Xiongnu repeatedly, especially in the 124, 123, 121, 119, and 71 (under Emperor Xuan 宣帝) campaigns.
- 119–115 Zhang Qian's second mission to the Western Regions.
- 111 Annexation of Nanyue.
- 108 The four commanderies of Lelang 樂浪 are set up in northern Korea and Liaoning.
- 102 The Han brings Dayuan 大宛 (Fergana, Uzbekistan) to submission.
- 91–90 The witchcraft scandal (*wugu zhiluo* 巫蠱之禍).
- 87 Emperor Wu dies.
- 87–68 The ascendancy of Huo Guang 霍光 who dominates the court under Emperors Zhao 昭帝 (r. 87–74) and Xuan (r. 74–49).
- 57–56 Xiongnu is weakened significantly due to internal strife.
- 51 Xiongnu *chanyu* 單于 (leader) Huhanye 呼韓邪 visited the Han court as a vassal.
- 1 BCE–8 CE Wang Mang 王莽 is the true power-holder at court.
- 8–23 CE Wang Mang's Xin dynasty**, an interregnum between the two Han dynasties.
- 9 Wang Mang implements the well-field system.
- 17 Multiple rebellions break out.
- 22 Among the rebel armies, the Chimei 赤眉 (Red Eyebrows) and Lülin 綠林 (Green Woods) are the most powerful.
- 23 Liu Xuan 劉玄 (Gengshi 更始) is placed on the throne, with Yuan 宛 city (Nanyang, Henan) as his capital. Wang Mang 王莽 is killed as Chang'an is captured by loyalist rebels.
- 25–220 Eastern Han dynasty**
- 25 Liu Xiu 劉秀, Emperor Guangwu 光武, takes the imperial title and makes Luoyang his capital. Red Eyebrows rebels kill Emperor Gengshi at Chang'an.
- 26–29 Guangwu forces the Red Eyebrows to surrender and conquers the warlords of the North China plain and the middle Yangzi. Dou Rong 竇融 in the north-west allies with Guangwu.
- 30 Abolition of compulsory military service for the inner commanderies (*neijun* 內郡) of the empire.
- 32–33 Defeat and death of the northwestern warlord Wei Ao (Xiao) 隗囂.
- 35–36 The rival emperor Gongsun Shu 公孫述 is destroyed in Shu (Sichuan). Guangwu is the undisputed sovereign of a restored Han empire.
- 37–45 Xiongnu attacks along the northern frontier.
- 40–43 Rebellion of the Trưng sisters in northern Vietnam.
- 48–50 Split of the Xiongnu into Northern and Southern Xiongnu; the northern frontier territories are restored
- 57 Death of Emperor Guangwu, succeeded by his son Emperor Ming 明帝.
- 69 Submission of the Ailao 哀牢 people in the southwest.

- 73–75 Expedition against the Northern Xiongnu; failed establishment of a Protectorate-General for the Western Regions.
- 75 Death of Emperor Ming, succeeded by his son Emperor Zhang 章.
- 77–101 Wars against the Shadong Qiang 燒當羌.
- 88 Death of Emperor Zhang, succeeded by his son Emperor He 和 under the regency of Empress Dowager Dou 竇太后.
- 89–91 Dou Xian 竇憲 destroys Northern Chanyu.
- 91 Ban Chao 班超 dominates the Western Regions and is named Protector-General.
- 92 An imperial coup destroys the Dou clan.
- 93 Death of Southern Chanyu Tuntuhe 屯屠何 is followed by a revolt among the surrendered Northerners.
- 94 Ban Chao completes his control of the Tarim basin.
- 97 Ban Chao sends Gan Ying 甘英 on a mission to Daqin 大秦/Rome.
- 100 Surrendered Qiang are settled within Liang province 涼州.
- 102 Ban Chao retires as Protector-General of the Western Regions.
- 105 Death of Emperor He, followed by the regency of Empress Dowager Deng; she brings Emperor An 安 to the throne but continues to rule until her death.
- 106 Rebellion in the Western Regions.
- 107 Orders are given to abandon the Western Regions.
- 107–118 The Great Qiang rebellion devastates the northwest.
- 121 Death of the Dowager Deng; Emperor An accedes to power.
- 125 Death of Emperor An; his dowager Yan 閼 takes power, but a coup by palace eunuchs brings the former heir Liu Bao 劉保, Emperor Shun 順, to the throne.
- 135 Liang Shang 梁商, father of Emperor Shun's empress, is appointed General-in-Chief and head of the administration.
- 140–144 Rebellions among the Qiang and Xiongnu; much of the northwest is left without effective government.
- 141 Liang Shang dies, succeeded as General-in-Chief by his son Liang Ji 梁冀.
- 142 Zhang Daoling 張道陵 founds the Daoist movement, known as the Way of Five Pecks of Rice (*wudoumi dao* 五斗米道).
- 144 Death of Emperor Shun; aided by Liang Ji, Empress Dowager Liang holds regency power for a series of minor emperors.
- 146 Empress Dowager Liang and Liang Ji bring Liu Zhi 劉志, Emperor Huan 桓, to the throne.
- 147 Liu Zhi is married to Liang Nüying 梁女瑩, younger sister of the empress dowager.
- 150 Death of Empress Dowager Liang; Liang Ji continues to dominate the government; vast expansion of the imperial harem.
- 159 Death of Empress Liang; aided by palace eunuchs, Emperor Huan destroys Liang Ji and takes over the government; Deng Mengnü 鄧猛女 is appointed empress; five eunuchs are enfeoffed.
- 159–166 Zhang Huan 張奐 and Huangfu Gui 皇甫規 maintain a measure of security in the north.
- 160 Execution of Li Yun 李雲 and Du Zhong 杜眾.
- 163 Some eunuch associates are punished for excessive conduct in the provinces.
- 166 Arrest and execution of anti-eunuch officials.
- 167 First Faction Incident.
- 167–169 Duan Jiong 段熲 slaughters the Qiang.

- 168 Following the death of Emperor Huan, the regent Dowager Dou and her father Dou Wu 竇武 bring the young Emperor Ling 靈 to the throne. Eunuch forces led by Cao Jie 曹節 overthrow the Dou group and thereafter control the government.
- 169 Second Faction Incident and the beginning of the Great Proscription (*danggu* 黨錮).
- 170s Raiding by Xianbei commanded by Tanshihuai 檀石槐.
- 172 Purge of the University (Grand Academy).
- 175 Commissioning of the Stone Classics project (*Xiping shijing* 熹平石經).
- 177 Failed expedition against the confederacy of Tanshihuai.
- 178 Endorsement of the School at the Gate of the Vast Capital (Hongdumen xue 鴻都門學) as a route for entry to the imperial service; Emperor Ling introduces a program for the sale of offices.
- 184 Yellow Turban religious rebels commanded by Zhang Jue (Jiao) 張角 ravage eastern China; they are defeated by imperial forces with heavy loss of life. Mutiny and rebellion in Liang province in the northwest.
- 188 The Southern Chanyu is killed by rebels and the Xiongnu state falls into disorder.
- 189 Death of Emperor Ling; his son Liu Bian 劉辯 is brought to the throne under the regency of his mother Empress Dowager He and her brother He Jin 何進; He Jin is assassinated by eunuchs; his troops attack the imperial palaces and kill the eunuchs. Seizing control, Dong Zhuo 董卓 deposes Liu Bian (Emperor Shao 少) and sets Liu Xie (Emperor Xian 獻) upon the throne.
- 190 Yuan Shao 袁紹 and other loyalists raise troops against Dong Zhuo and establish warlord states.
- 220 Emperor Xian is forced to abdicate in favor of Cao Pi 曹丕, son of the warlord Cao Cao, who founds the Wei (Cao-Wei) dynasty.

1

THE QIN DYNASTY (221–206 BCE)

Charles Sanft

The state of Qin before 221 BCE

The Qin dynasty was the foundational dynasty for the entire imperial period, if for no other reason than it established the structures and processes that were the starting point for all that followed.¹ There were, inevitably, changes to all aspects of these systems over time. Yet there was a degree of continuity, stretching perhaps even to the present. The state of Qin was prominent throughout the Warring States period of disunity in the area that would become China. The story of the Qin *dynasty*, however, begins in the fourth century BCE, well before its founding ended the Warring States.

The coming together of political figures and practices beginning in the fourth century BCE had a synergistic result that in the third century propelled the Qin past its competitors. In many ways the Qin emergence is typical of all historical development, in that it grew out of broad and long-term changes (Map 1.1).

The idea of political unification was not exclusive to the Qin. It grew out of long-standing philosophical discussions and debates about the nature of rulership and governance.² The military potency of the Qin has long been at the center of that dynasty's historiography. This is largely a result of Han writers' portrayals, which sought to define the dynasty in terms of violence and warfare. This belies the foundational position of the Qin dynasty in the history of imperial China. While the Qin systems grew directly out of and adapted preceding practice, they were in fact innovative. Real innovation in historical terms always has roots in what goes before. Focusing on military might is a way to minimize the achievement of the Qin. For their unique contributions came not in combat. Every dynasty fights; every historical period sees warfare. Few indeed sow the seeds of institutions that endure for millennia. The Qin did.

The rise of the Qin dynasty was an intellectual triumph more than a battlefield one. The thinker Shang Yang 商鞅 (d. 338 BCE) made fundamental contributions to this revolution in the conception of government in the fourth century BCE, while Qin was still only one of many competing states. Better known as Lord Shang, a name that gives the text associated with him its title, *The Book of Lord Shang* 商君書, Shang Yang articulated an information-centered approach to governing a state. He summarized the most important of the data sets as the "Thirteen Figures," which encompass the state of the state in its various aspects, especially the numbers of various population segments.³



Map 1.1 The Qin Empire. (See Tan Qixiang, vol. 2, 3–4.)

Based on *The Book of Lord Shang* and his biography in Sima Qian's *Grand Scribe's Records* (Shiji 史記), Shang Yang is generally credited with changes in several areas. Aspects of his proposals are chronologically complicated, and the most important of the developments associated with him—a system of population registration—had previously been proposed. But all accounts indicate that, as chancellor under Duke Xiao of Qin 秦孝公, Shang Yang made influential changes to governmental policy. The old hierarchy of noble and commoner was done away with and in its place the Qin established a series of social ranks. Every male member of the population held one of these ranks and could move up for a variety of acts in the interest of the state, particularly success in battle: taking an enemy head in battle, for instance, would add one level. The Qin grouped households into sets of five. The component households were supposed to both keep watch on the others members of the set and to help them if the need arose. Like other aspects of Qin governance, these acts have often been criticized, yet no few of the innovations Qin carried out in the fourth century BCE continued into subsequent dynasties. Indeed, a system of household registration functions in China still today.

Despite the obvious value of its insights, *The Book of Lord Shang* expresses its ideas in an absolutist tone that belies their true function. It is impossible to know to what degree Shang Yang's rhetoric derived from its context and how much resulted from later editing. But careful analysis of his proposals suggests much more than simple totalitarianism. Later

historiography has heaped criticism upon the Qin, yet objective consideration suggests that the changes they carried out—changes connected with Shang Yang—likely improved social cohesion and function.⁴

Shang Yang did not live to see the results of his theories. He was a firm favorite of Duke Xiao. But when that duke died and his son King Huiwen 惠文王 ascended the throne, things changed for Lord Shang. The new ruler received and believed reports that Shang Yang was disloyal. Shang Yang tried to flee, but was soon executed and his corpse dismembered.

The stature of the Qin state was improving toward the end of the fourth century BCE. King Huiwen received at his coronation embassies from some of the most important states; even more tellingly, the following year, the Zhou king himself sent congratulations. Still clearer indication of Qin's growing power, though, came a few years later, when a number of states, including some that had paid their respects previously, banded together with steppes-dwelling groups from the north to wage an unsuccessful attack on Qin. The remaining years of the fourth century BCE were replete with military activity as the Warring States contended with each other.

Another major thinker to contribute to the Qin's rise was Xun Kuang 荀况, commonly known as Xunzi 荀子 or Master Xun. He was born in the late fourth century BCE, and his long life spanned most of the third century. Master Xun combined the strands of argument in favor of a single polity under a single ruler to make the philosophical case for unification. Master Xun most famously argued that human nature is bad and requires control—the sort of control that a comprehensive legal system could provide. Master Xun also propounded a method of rule that was based on virtue, not as an abstraction but rather as a strategy for improving political standing. Making the ruler's reputation for virtue known inside the state would improve his standing and the obedience of the population. Over time, the ruler's reputation could even spread beyond the borders and induce other states' populations to wish to join him. The eventual Qin state combined the many sides of this proposition to create a state that was both all-penetrating and virtuous—by its own standards—and known throughout the realm.

On the political side, the Qin dynasty's final ascent to hegemony traces its beginning to the middle of the third century when King Zhuangxiang 莊襄王 (r. 249–247 BCE) took the throne. During his short time in power, Zhuangxiang demonstrated a mix of public relations savvy and decisive action much like that which would serve his son so well. He marked his coming to power by granting beneficence to the common population, his ministers, and his relatives. The ruler of the decrepit Zhou house, for his part, banded together with the lords of other states to attack Qin. Zhuangxiang responded by dispatching his chancellor Lü Buwei 呂不韋 against the Zhou, and the Qin destroyed the last vestiges of that house's political power in 256 BCE.

King Zhuangxiang subsequently sent a general to attack the state of Hann 韓, which responded by ceding territory. After that, and in the following year, the same general captured some dozens of walled towns in the states of Wei 魏 and Zhao 趙. An army drawn from five states and sent to preserve Wei met and defeated Qin forces. They chased the Qin to Hangu Pass, which guarded the entrance to the Qin homeland, then turned back. Later that year, King Zhuangxiang died and his son, the future First Emperor, ascended the throne to rule as King Zheng 政. It was 246 BCE, and he was but twelve years old.

The new monarch inherited not only the title of king but also the fruits of his predecessors' expansionist ambitions. Qin territory already encompassed lands to the north, south, and east of the original Qin state. These possessions provided resources that supported the further ambitions of the Qin. For Qin, however, intellectual power was at least as important

as any of these. And the Qin brain trust in the third century BCE was formidable. Lü Buwei had made a fortune through trade, a part of which he invested in the successful pursuit of philosophy. He was an active supporter of the future emperor, and became first his regent, then chancellor. One of Master Xun's students, Li Si 李斯, was an official, still minor then, though destined for the heights of power. Another of Master Xun's students, Han Fei 韓非, would deeply influence the emperor through his essays.

Lü Buwei wielded power until the ninth year of the new king's reign, 238 BCE, when King Zheng underwent the rituals for entering formal adulthood. Squalid tales dominate accounts of King Zheng's ninth year on the throne. But as the new power dynamics at court developed, Lü Buwei and others were eventually repudiated and King Zheng came to exert power himself.

The king did not rule without advice, as events of the following year reflect. Presumably inspired by the negative and excessive influence of outsiders like Lü Buwei, members of the Qin ruler's clan persuaded him to issue an order expelling those men from other states who had come to give service to Qin. Li Si was one of those, and he wrote a letter in response to his ejection. In it he listed previous Qin rulers who had employed men from outside the state and thereby achieved success. Li Si pointed out that the intellectual underpinnings of the Qin project were no more autochthonous than were the imported jewels that adorned its king. Li Si added, by way of closing, which seems like an unsubtle threat: sending away talented men is pushing them into the service of competing states, which would have no xenophobic scruples about putting their talents to use. As soon as he read Li Si's arguments, King Zheng reversed himself and vacated his previous command. He re-appointed Li Si and subsequently followed his advice.

Li Si advocated a sophisticated plan to undermine competing local rulers and remove their troublesome underlings. Men who could be subverted by bribes would be; those impervious to corruption would be killed. Only when this weakening was complete would military action follow to complete what would be, by that time, practically a *fait accompli*. The Song dynasty historian Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086) credits this course of action as the most important aspect of Qin strategy and the one responsible for its success.⁵ Qin ascendancy arose from an intellectual approach to conquest and leadership that subordinated military force to other means, though it did not do away with it.

The rapid sequence of battlefield victories that came in the last dozen or so years of the Warring States period and culminated in the unification of China in 221 BCE can be passed over quickly. It suffices to say that none could stand against the Qin. The activities of the new Qin dynasty upon defeating their enemies show that what came after unification was more important than the battles that preceded it.

The founding of the Qin dynasty

The flurry of activity that followed the Qin military victory reflects their understanding that success in battle is something quite different from creating a lasting polity. In Sima Qian's account in the *Grand Scribe's Records*, the earliest extant history of Qin, changes to government at Xianyang (near modern Xi'an, Shaanxi), the new capital, predominate. The emperor adopted a new title and new terminology. He even decreed in advance the title by which he would be known posthumously. He was to be the First Emperor, and his successors would be known in terms of their distance from him: next would come the Second Emperor, then the Third Emperor, and so on, into the future. It might be easy to doubt the efficacy of vocabulary changes beyond the confines of the center, but paleographic sources confirm at least some of this sort of changes were put in place beyond the capital.⁶

Arguably the most significant text in Chinese history, the announcement of unification came into being around this same time. It was an inscription on measuring vessels that appeared across the Qin realm. Its text employed and publicized the ruler's new title, among other things:

In the 26th year of his reign (221 BCE), the emperor unified all the lords of the realm. The common people had great peace, and he established the title of emperor. Now he commands chancellors Zhuang and Wan: "In all cases clarify and unify those laws and units of measure that are disparate or doubtful."⁷

No received historical source recorded this text. Perhaps early historians, like many historians today, perceived this command mainly in terms of the institutional change it ordered, imposing a standardized system of weights and measures. But to focus on that alone is to miss its more enduring message of unification. For unlike the specifically Qin system of weights and measures, the notion of a unified polity expressed here became and remained the ideal ever since.

Archaeologists have found examples of this inscription in many places and in various forms: it was pressed into clay, mounted on steelyards, and cast into weights. We can safely assume that what we have is only a small portion of the examples that existed at the time. This announcement of unification and the emperor's claim that he had brought peace to All Under Heaven must have been nearly ubiquitous in its time. In this way and others, and although they did not invent the idea, the Qin and their ruler disseminated across the realm knowledge of the existence of the new, single polity under one sovereign. It was the effective communication of both the fact and the idea of unification that makes this text, without hyperbole, likely to have been the most important in premodern Chinese history.

The aspects of the edict that command a new set of weights and measures invite skepticism. It is obvious that there is no way any government could simply do away with existing units of measure. Even today, China functions with multiple systems of weights and measures, the metric system alongside local units such as the *jin* (catty). Yet the media by which the wide dispersal of the proclamation of standardization across the realm took place suggests widespread contact with the new system. Many instances of the inscription appear to have come from official measures used for grain. This suggests that the payment of taxes in kind, at least, would have used the new units. Sima Qian says that the Qin chose six as their numeral, and used it to set certain standards: carriage width (six Qin feet, about 138.6 cm), the official pace (also six Qin feet), and the number of horses that drew the imperial chariot.

The administration of the new empire

In his proclamation of the new polity, the First Emperor juxtaposed the elimination of local lords with the peace he claimed to have brought to the population. In doing this, the First Emperor hinted that the divided form of Zhou rule was the cause of disorder. When it came time to organize governance in the new state, his high officials made this same connection. In place of the Zhou system of granting nobles power in specific areas, they proposed a new form of governance that placed the entire realm under a central, bureaucratic administration. The largest administrative units were to be regions or commanderies (*jun*), variable in size but comparable to US states; under the commanderies were counties (*xian*). Sima Qian says the Qin established 36 commanderies and scholars long tried to create a definitive list of them. The task proved impossible, and no wonder: excavated materials indicate there were

in fact more than 36 commanderies. In early texts the number 36 can mean simply “many,” and that now seems the best understanding of the phrase in this context. There are various words in classical Chinese to denote many; perhaps Sima Qian or his source(s) chose this one because of Qin numerology and its focus on 6, 36 being, of course, the result of 6 times 6.

There were official positions of responsibility at each level of these divisions. At the top of the bureaucracy was the chancellor, who reported directly to the emperor. Every commandery had a governor and every county a prefect (*ling* 令 or *zhang* 長), each with a staff of supporting officials. The commanderies and the counties were the primary nodes for gathering information and submitting it to the central authorities. Below the counties were townships (*xiang* 鄉), neighborhoods (*ting* 亭), and villages (*li* 里). Within the villages, households were grouped into sets of five. Residents of these groups were required to assist each other and to report on each other’s misdeeds. While each group of five had its leader, the present evidence does not indicate that person was an official; it seems each was instead simply designated from among householders.⁸

Administrative details from Liye and beyond

Thanks to archaeological finds in recent years, we have far more detailed information about Qin governance than was available to historians at any point since the early imperial period. The largest find of Qin administrative documents to date comes from the town of Liye 里耶 in Hunan.⁹ Sometime in the late third century BCE, someone dumped into a well there a mass of governmental records from Qianling 遷陵 county, in Dongting 洞庭, one of the previously unknown Qin commanderies. The anaerobic environment at the bottom of the well preserved many from decay.

These wooden and bamboo strips and slats bring us firsthand information about the functioning of local government in the Qin. The publication of photographs and transcriptions is ongoing and promises to last years. But new understandings about Qin administrative structures are emerging from the information already available. Much of the material records matters such as taxes, grain distribution, the provision and disposal of materiel, the passage of documents between offices, and so on.

Records of the population are an important part of the Liye materials. The Qin enforced a system of population registration that organized and recorded the entire population. In this system, at least as it was supposed to work, a complex of three pieces of information identified each person, male or female, adult or minor, free or slave: name, rank, and place of registration. It was every individual’s responsibility to maintain a place of registered residence, and failure to do so brought legal sanction. That much was already known. What the Liye strips make newly clear is that the system allowed the government to track specific people across distances and to pursue them, albeit slowly, for their obligations to it.¹⁰

These documents also attest to another sphere in which the Qin government interacted with its population, namely religion. They record that the county bureaucracy provided materials for ritual sacrifices of food: meat, grain, salt, and beer. The officials recorded the types and amounts of the provisions they dispensed from their stores. When the proceedings were complete, they also recorded the sale of the leftovers, a process subject to layers of supervision. Officials in Qianling carried out these sacrifices in honor of certain spirits, including the First Farmer (Xiannong 先農). Their records name at least one other spirit, too, but there remains disagreement among scholars about identification. Directions for individual prayer to the First Farmer at a grain storage building, which archaeologists recovered from a Qin official’s grave at Zhoujiatai 周家台, add still more information about contemporary religion

and suggest that officials may have been involved in broader religious practice, too, and not only directly government-sponsored observances.¹¹

Law and legal practice under the Qin

The Qin legal system has long been famous and has, in many respects, defined basic perceptions of the dynasty. For Han historians, its supposed excesses resulted in the Qin's downfall, and later historians followed those early interpretations. But archaeologists upended our notions of the Qin legal system in the 1970s, when they discovered a set of Qin legal materials in a tomb of the late third century BCE.¹² Much of the find consists of legal statutes. These include sections forbidding the sorts of offenses that one would expect: theft, murder, and assault were all punishable, as was plotting to commit an offense. Unauthorized sacrifices were also against the law. While magistrates were required to adhere to the content of the law closely, the statutes do not provide an exhaustive list of crimes. Rather they specify certain crimes and establish categories that permitted legal officials to determine the appropriate punishments for other delicts.¹³ The punishments for violations included fines, beatings, imprisonment combined with labor service, and physical mutilation.

One of the most surprising aspects of Qin law was its criminalization of "unfilial" behavior. Filial piety is, of course, commonly considered a "Confucian" virtue, while the Qin are, conventionally, the epitome of "Legalist" practice. Some scholars have tried to argue that the presence of this crime is evidence of "Confucian" influence on Qin society, but the strained nature of that approach is obvious. It is much preferable to recognize that filiality was a social value that people in early imperial China shared generally, and was not the exclusive property of one or another group.¹⁴

A sizable portion of the statutes concerns civil matters. Agriculture is prominent, including the recording and management of fields, the reporting of weather, and the care of government draft animals and implements. Another matter that receives much attention in the statutes is the actions of officials, including legal officials, who, in case of error or malfeasance, stood to suffer the same sorts of punishments as ordinary criminals. The Qin were clearly interested in enforcing a fair application of the law.

The same group of grave texts also records the processes officials used to interrogate those suspected of crimes. The picture that emerges is of a ritual that served not merely to determine facts *per se*, but rather to establish a functional truth about events. This worked to counter a fundamental unease concerning the fallibility of legal processes, a broad theme in early legal thought.¹⁵

Imperial publicity

A series of imperial progresses punctuated the decade of the First Emperor's reign over All Under Heaven from 221 until 210 BCE. Historians have offered various explanations for these travels: inspections, ritual observances, and even religious observances. Sima Qian's account in the *Grand Scribe's Records*, the main source for the period, portrays these events as a flurry of disconnected activities. There is nevertheless a thread tying them together: a conspicuous interest in attracting attention and generating publicity emerges at every turn. This is not to say that the other aspects were absent; they were, however, subordinate to the still larger aim of consolidating battlefield achievements into a functional polity. The same emperor that announced the unification of the realm under him (alongside his alteration of the system of weights and measures) with an inscription communicated the same essential message when

he traveled in great pomp through the new state. It may be noted that, as in so many things, the Qin ruler did not so much invent the progress—his predecessors made conceptually similar trips—as expand its scope and effect.

The First Emperor's four progresses

The first of the First Emperor's journeys occurred already in his second year on the throne (220 BCE). On this tour, he did not go outside the territory of the original Qin state. The relatively modest scale of this trip does not reflect any flagging in the Napoleonic ambition that had brought him to power. That same year, the Qin began construction of two palaces and a series of enclosed ways connecting them to the capital. They also began to make highways.

The following year (219 BCE) saw the second tour, which went further afield. The First Emperor ascended three mountains (all in *Shandong*), Mt. Zouyi 鄒嶧, Mt. Tai 泰, and Mt. Liangfu 梁父, a foothill of Mt. Tai. In all cases, religious observances were part of the activities on site, and the First Emperor caused a stele to be put up at each place. In connection with the visit to Mt. Zouyi, the emperor engaged in a discussion about these observances with ritual specialists before making offerings. At Mt. Tai, the offerings were followed by a storm. The Mt. Tai stele, *inter alia*, reminds the reader of unification and proclaims the First Emperor's resolution to continue his activities:

The August Thearch [Emperor] embodies sagehood,
And after having pacified all under heaven
He has not been remiss in rulership.
He rises early, retires late at night;
He establishes and sets up enduring benefits.¹⁶

The First Emperor continued traveling, following the seacoast and ascending more mountains, including Mts. Cheng 成 and Zhifu 芝罘, placing at the latter yet another stele. The group then proceeded further south until arriving at Langye 琅琊 (in *Shandong*), where the emperor constructed a terrace. Here, too, he erected a stele, which bore a message still more ambitious than the previous one:

Wherever human traces reach,
There is none who does not declare himself [the Thearch's] subject.
His merits surpass those of the Five Thearchs.¹⁷

This sort of vainglory, ranking himself above the sage kings of antiquity, is perhaps to be expected from the ruler who had united the realm. Yet the placement of this text in historical accounts draws attention to a shift in the portrayal of the First Emperor. A distinct note of hubris extending to absurdity marks the *Grand Scribe's Records* accounts of this progress and the First Emperor's later acts. Thus, after the stele is set up, so the accounts go, vague reports of immortals on islands in the sea occasioned the dispatching of thousands of young people to seek them. The First Emperor seeks (unsuccessfully) to rescue fabled Zhou dynasty tripods from the bottom of a river. He encounters more bad weather after another sacrifice and decides to punish the spirits he made the offering to by denuding their mountain abode of its tree cover.

Faced with this sort of narrative, the historian has a choice. Many scholars in the past, operating under the pervasive influence of Han historiography, have looked upon these stories as evidence of Qin arrogance blending into insanity. More recent historians often dismiss these accounts as unverifiable. There is something to this, of course: at the distance of more

than two millennia, any sort of exaggerated tale deserves skepticism. Some scholars have reacted by shifting away from text to concentrate on material remains, in essence moving away from history. Others have taken a more antiquarian approach of cataloging. Most of these approaches tacitly accept in essence the form of the account in the *Grand Scribe's Records*, which presents the First Emperor's actions as a scattershot series of actions devoid of logic. Yet there is, in fact, something that connects them: their publicity value. Considering these actions as creating widespread knowledge of the emperor and, by extension, his power, either by marking the landscape or by putting up an inscription, gives them a logic that argues against casual dismissal.

The next year (218 BCE) saw still another imperial journey to the east. The entourage ascended Mt. Zhifu, where they again left an inscription, which again manifests the themes of pride and ambition. A fourth progress occurred in 215 BCE, when the First Emperor visited Jieshi 碣石 (in Changli, Hebei) where he left still another inscription. He then went to Jiuyuan 九原 commandery (in Baotou, Inner Mongolia and nearby areas) on the northern border of the realm. The emperor dispatched an army with General Meng Tian 蒙恬 at its head after his return. The *Grand Scribe's Records* attributes this course of action to a misunderstood augury that seemed to predict the Qin would fall to barbarian invasion. Only in retrospect does the message appear to become a correct, if ambiguous, prediction of events.

Getting needed reinforcements to the border could as well explain why the emperor sent troops there. This interpretation becomes more convincing when one notes accounts of the following year (214 BCE). General Meng Tian pushed the Xiongnu, a nomadic people, out of sections of the border regions, which were turned into counties and defended by a long series of fortifications—predecessors of the Great Wall. This reportedly overawed the Qin's northern neighbors. It is perhaps not a coincidence that the First Emperor sent a body of convicts and other undesirables as soldiers to the south, where they conquered territory that became new commanderies. The Qin colonized both areas that year and the next with convicts.

The burning of books and execution of scholars

One of the central pillars of the critical historiography of the Qin is that they “burned books and buried scholars [alive].” This has become metonymic shorthand for the supposed totalitarianism and barbarism of the dynasty. While this account is famous, there are many problems with it, which are enough to raise serious doubts about whether the events occurred as early histories depicted them.

The basic storyline is simple and divides into two parts. The burning of books is said to have happened in 213 BCE, occasioned by a memorial from Li Si. He complained that ancient texts were used to criticize the Qin dynasty and proposed, and the emperor approved, banning the ownership of all sorts of texts except those of practical use. The banned books were to be turned in to the authorities, who would burn them. The execution of scholars supposedly followed the flight of two “masters of techniques” the following year. They had advised the First Emperor on how to avoid demons, on longevity, and on similar matters. The emperor had treated them generously, but they criticized him before their abrupt departure. When word of their criticism reached the emperor, he ordered an investigation into the many scholars around the court, which allegedly ended in the execution of more than 460 men.

The execution of scholars and the burning of books have come to stand for a thoroughgoing and violent opposition of the Qin to the previous intellectual tradition. Yet there is reason to question the interpretation of these events. That the First Emperor executed scholars who displeased him is entirely plausible. Emperors in imperial times exercised power over

life and death, and no few of them put opponents and critics to death. But to see this as some sort of determined attempt to alter the intellectual landscape of the Qin dynasty or an expression of particular opposition to traditional culture is uncertain. There were learned men throughout the imperial government. Li Si, himself a former student of the scholarly Master Xun, is a perfect example of this. Killing a small portion of the intelligentsia necessarily left many more behind who were imbued with the writings and thought of earlier ages.

The burning of books is at least equally questionable. Evidence indicates that many of the extensive texts purporting to relate preimperial matters probably came into being only during the Han period. They simply did not yet exist during the Qin period. For instance, the available evidence indicates that the *Analects of Confucius* was created only after the Qin dynasty—during the Western Han dynasty—from various shorter accounts. The enforcement of a ban on texts would require not merely locating and doing away with something as noticeable as books. It would entail finding and identifying short texts that referred to the material in question, and, by the way, differentiating them from the pragmatic texts that were legal to possess. It is hard to imagine that a government with the limited technological capabilities of the Qin would have been able to identify owners of texts. A medieval historian (Sima Guang) makes this point by implication. It relates that a descendent of Confucius who responded to an acquaintance's worries about the destruction of books by pointing out how little danger he was in, saying that instead of surrendering his texts, he would simply hide them. Just as killing a small number of scholars could not be expected to alter the intellectual landscape, an unenforceable ban on certain texts would likely be pointless and without widespread impact.

The First Emperor was not a particularly beneficent ruler, nor one whose model one would like to see emulated in the present. But to propose a series of actions that were simultaneously violent and futile would have been a waste of resources and counterproductive. It would have been crazy. And that was probably the point. The Han historians painted the Qin dynasty as power-mad and hubristic, the antithesis of the Han dynasty that succeeded them, a depiction that later scholars repeated and elaborated upon.

The First Emperor's final years

The year 212 BCE brought with it another round of construction projects. One of the most famous was a stretch of highway known as the Direct Road. This road linked the region of the capital with Jiuyuan on the northern border. The assertions of archaeologists and local chauvinists notwithstanding, much of the highway's route is unknown. Roads in early China were made of packed earth, which does not age well. Sections of the road still exist, though, particularly in the arid Ordos region of the northwest.¹⁸

Two other famous Qin building projects date to this same time. One of these is the tomb of the First Emperor, a mausoleum known as Mt. Li 驪山. The contents of this artificial hill are legendary in both senses of the word. It is, of course, itself renowned. And the tomb was supposedly filled with treasures. But archaeologists have not opened it, and no one knows what is—or was—inside. Mythology seems likely to be at work.

Accounts of another famous Qin undertaking strengthen the latter impression, and that is the Epang Palace. According to the *Grand Scribe's Records*, the Qin planned the Epang Palace as the front section of a new imperial palace complex outside Xianyang. It was intended to have space within it to seat thousands, presumably in an expansive open courtyard, and its opulence became a byword for Qin profligacy. Because of ambiguity in the descriptions, scholars since early on thought that the Epang Palace was mostly completed and then

destroyed around the time of the Qin dynasty's end. Modern archaeology has destroyed these notions. We know the location of the palace and the giant rammed-earth platform that was to hold it. But excavations have shown that construction never got much further than that. Pictures of its supposed extravagance resulted from literary imagination that embellished ambiguous accounts.¹⁹

The *Grand Scribe's Records* says the Emperor built numerous palaces, which were linked by walled walkways. The idea was to hide the emperor's whereabouts by making it difficult to determine his location at any particular time. Sima Qian attributes this to paranoia, although a reasonable interest in personal security could also explain it. The *Grand Scribe's Records* reports several attempts on the First Emperor's life, and there were doubtless more.

In the winter of early 210 BCE, the First Emperor began his fifth and, as it turned out, final progress. Chancellor Li Si and the emperor's youngest son Huhai 胡亥 both joined the entourage. This progress began in a manner like the others, as the emperor and his companions traveled southeast from the capital, visiting Yunmeng 雲夢 (in *Hubei*), and sacrificing to one of the semi-mythological sage emperors at Mt. Jiuyi 九嶷. This portion of the tour is the only one of the five imperial progresses that finds independent confirmation. The terse chronicle of a local official's life records the visit, which must have been a major event throughout the region.²⁰

The emperor and his party traveled further on the *Yangzi* and by land, offering more sacrifices and installing one more inscription praising the Qin. They followed the seacoast up to revisit Langye and Zhifu. Shortly afterward, they went north to Shaiu 沙丘 (in southern Hebei), where the First Emperor became sick. We have no details about his illness. The First Emperor was not a young man, and a natural death would not have been extraordinary. Yet the dubious succession that followed his decease in the autumn of 210 BCE allows for suspicion of a plot. At his death, the First Emperor had ruled the realm he brought into being for just over ten years. It was a decade of relative peace and stability that was all the more remarkable because it followed centuries of warfare. Whatever the First Emperor was, or may have been, his governance was effective.

The successor

History records that the First Emperor was averse to discussing death. But as his impending death became certain, he wrote a letter to his son Fusu 扶蘇. The text that comes to us does not include any explicit transfer of power. Its orders—to put Meng Tian in charge of the army and to hold his funeral at Xianyang—nevertheless leave no doubt that Fusu was the intended successor.

After sealing the missive, the emperor passed it to the eunuch Zhao Gao 趙高. But instead of having it delivered, Zhao Gao conspired with the emperor's son Huhai to put the latter on the throne. In place of the emperor's orders, Fusu received a forged command to commit suicide. The conspirators concocted a document appointing Huhai the heir designate. When they arrived back at the capital and announced the death of the First Emperor, Huhai duly became the new ruler, the Second Emperor.

The Second Emperor began his rule with every appearance of filiality. He expanded the cults of the First Emperor, increasing both the number of sacrifices in the Ancestral Temple to the First Emperor and the number of ritual offerings to nature spirits. In acknowledged imitation of his predecessor, the Second Emperor undertook an imperial progress in 209 BCE. He visited two of the steles his father had put up and added his own inscriptions.

Behind this, however, lurked the eunuch Zhao Gao, who had maneuvered himself into the new emperor's confidence. When the Second Emperor appealed to him for advice about dealing with recalcitrant high officials and imperial clan members, Zhao Gao responded with a proposal to carry out a purge, which the Second Emperor ordered. Officials who argued against this course of action were treated as criminals. The resulting deaths of high officials and imperial relatives sent shock waves throughout the country.

Not long afterward, the emperor commanded the resumption of the construction of Epang Palace, and summoned tens of thousands of men to the capital. This expanded population of non-farmers needed food. Orders to the hinterlands to provide provisions notwithstanding, the populace of the capital region was left without sufficient food. Rather than consider relaxing its demands or feeding the populace, the Second Emperor's government doubled down on enforcement of the law. It is no surprise that organized, or at least semi-organized, insurgency arose around this time. The insurrection under Chen She 陳涉 (Chen Sheng 陳勝) in the area of the former Chu state is the most famous of these early movements. It inspired more uprisings that sprung up independently in different places.

When reports of rebellion reached the palace, the Second Emperor responded by punishing those who relayed the news. This had the predictable result that subsequently only assurances that things were under control came to his ears. Such was the case even as the rebels enjoyed successes, and as armies under increasingly able commanders, including the future Han founder, Liu Bang 劉邦, emerged.

The Second Emperor was as a result caught off guard when an army dispatched by Chen She reached the area of the capital. Facing a large invading force without enough troops to protect himself, the emperor followed the advice of a courtier to free convict laborers across the realm to fight. This led to a temporary reprieve for the Qin as their expanded forces scored scattered victories, including routing the force closest to the capital and killing Chen She. Yet at the capital, the weakness of the Second Emperor's rule took its toll. Zhao Gao persuaded him to avoid exposing his shortcomings in discussions with ministers by withdrawing further from active rule, leaving Zhao as middleman. Predictably, unrest increased anew.

In a belated attempt at saving the Qin dynasty, three high officials, including Li Si, remonstrated with the Second Emperor. They pointed out that the Qin had failed to successfully counter the rebels, whose ranks swelled with those dissatisfied with the government's demands for taxes and labor service. The Second Emperor's response was so disjointed that reading it gives the distinct impression that he was drunk or otherwise disordered. He began by quoting the philosopher Han Fei to support the notion that the ruler of the realm ought to be able to fulfill his desires, and then criticized the alleged asceticism of the sage kings as unworthy of emulation. He defended his construction projects as symbols of the imperial enterprise—symbols that were yet to be completed. And he ended his tirade by blaming the remonstrators for failing in their duties. All three were sent down for trial; two committed suicide rather than face that humiliation, and Li Si was executed.

From this point on, the historical narrative focuses on two aspects. Outside the capital, the various insurrections grew. Eventually, two rival camps emerged under Liu Bang and his nemesis, Xiang Yu 項羽, respectively. Inside the capital, the story devolves into a tale of murder and machinations. Zhao Gao saw doom approaching and tried to preserve himself. He arranged the death of the Second Emperor and proclaimed that Qin would revert to its former status of kingdom. The final ruler of Qin was consequently a king, not an emperor, and known to posterity by the name Ziying 子嬰 rather than the Third Emperor. Well aware of Zhao Gao's perfidy, Ziying killed the eunuch in short order after taking the throne.

In early 206 BCE, Ziyang went on an unadorned cart pulled by a white horse, his neck bound to signal submission, and surrendered to Liu Bang. The Han founder spared him. But when Xiang Yu arrived just over a month later, he put Ziyang to death, along with others of the former ruling house, and ravaged the Qin capital Xianyang. That was the end of the Qin dynasty. Its legacy persists.

Notes

- 1 The historical overview I present here draws from *Shiji* 5.173–221 (“Qin benji”), 6.223–294 (“Qin Shihuang benji”), 87.2539–63 (“Li Si liezhuan”); *Zizhi tongjian* esp.1–3.186–295 (“Qin ji”). See also Sanft, *Communication*; Charles Sanft, “The Qin Empire,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Early China*, edited by Paul R. Goldin (London: Routledge, forthcoming).
- 2 Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire*.
- 3 Jiang Lihong 蔣禮鴻, *Shangjun shu zhuizhi* 商君書錐指 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 34.
- 4 On the changes credited to Shang Yang and an analysis of their likely effects, see Sanft, “Shang Yang,” 174–91. On Shang Yang’s rhetoric, see Pines, “Alienating Rhetoric,” 79–110; on the textual history of the *Book of Lord Shang*, see Yuri Pines, “Dating a Pre-Imperial Text: The Case Study of The Book of Lord Shang,” *Early China* 39 (2016), 145–84.
- 5 Sima Guang, *Zizhi tongjian*, 218.
- 6 Zhang Chunlong 張春龍 and Long Jingsha 龍京沙, “Xiangxi Liye Qin jian 8–455 hao” 湘西里耶秦簡 8–455 號, in by Wuhan daxue jianbo yanjiu zhongxin, ed., *Jianbo* 簡帛, no. 4 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2009), 11–5; Hu Pingsheng 胡平生, “Liye Qin jian 8–455 hao mufang xingzhi chuyi,” 里耶秦簡 8–455 號木方性質芻議 in *Jianbo*, no. 4, 17–25; Sanft, *Communication*, 59.
- 7 Sanft, *Communication*, 59.
- 8 Sanft, “Qin Government,” 118–29; Sanft, “Shang Yang”; Charles Sanft, “Population Records from Liye: Ideology in Practice,” in *Ideology of Power and Power of Ideology in Early China*, ed. Yuri Pines, Paul R. Goldin, and Martin Kern (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 249–69; Chen Wei 陳偉, “Qin Cangwu Dongting erjun chulun” 秦蒼梧、洞庭二郡芻論, *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究 5 (2003), 168–72. On the senses of the word “*sanshiliu*” 三十六 (i.e., thirty-six), see *Hanyu dacidian* 漢語大辭典 (Luo Zhufeng 羅竹風 et al. eds. Shanghai: Hanyu dacidian chubanshe, 1997).
- 9 This discussion of Liye draws upon Robin D.S. Yates, “The Qin,” 291–329.
- 10 Sanft, “Population Records,” 249–69.
- 11 Yates, “The Qin Slips,” 318–26; Sanft, “Paleographic Evidence,” 327–58.
- 12 Shuihudi Qinmu zhujian zhengli xiaozu 睡虎地秦墓竹簡整理小組, ed., *Shuihudi Qinmu zhujian* 睡虎地秦墓竹簡 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990); these texts are translated and introduced in Hulsewé, *Remnants of Ch’in Law*.
- 13 Miranda Brown and Charles Sanft, “Categories and Legal Reasoning in Early Imperial China: The Meaning of *Fa* in Recovered Texts,” *Oriens Extremus* 49 (2010), 283–306.
- 14 Charles Sanft, “Dong Zhongshu’s *Chunqiu jueyu* Reconsidered: On the Legal Interest in Subjective States and the Privilege of Hiding Family Members’ Crimes as Developments from Earlier Practice,” *Early China* 33–4 (2010–11), 158–67 and *passim*.
- 15 Charles Sanft, “Notes on Penal Ritual and Subjective Truth under the Qin,” *Asia Major* (third series) 22.1 (2008), 35–57; Charles Sanft, “Concepts of Law in the *Shangshu*,” in *Origins of Chinese Political Thought: Studies in the Classic of Documents*, ed. Martin Kern and Dirk Meyer (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).
- 16 Martin Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch’in Shih-huang: Text and Ritual in Early Chinese Imperial Representation* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2000), 21.
- 17 Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions*, 33.
- 18 Sanft, “Debating the Route,” 323–46.
- 19 Sanft, “The Construction and Deconstruction of Epanggong,” 160–76.
- 20 Shuihudi Qinmu zhujian zhengli xiaozu, ed., *Shuihudi Qinmu zhujian*, 7.

2

THE WESTERN HAN

Liang CAI

The founding of the Western Han and the rise of the upper ruling elites

Among the several rebel leaders who vied for primacy at the end of the Qin dynasty, Liu Bang 劉邦 distinguished himself on the battlefield. Defeating his major rival, Xiang Yu 項羽, he established the first of the two consecutive Han dynasties, the Western Han. The narrative presented by Han scholars has until recently portrayed the Qin as a cruel empire that betrayed the social values and political legacy of the Zhou dynasty. By contrast, the Han dynasty was regarded as the orthodox heir of traditional Zhou culture. New studies show, however, that the founding of the Han dynasty saw the loss of influence of the old nobilities but created a new upper ruling elite (Map 2.1).

Both Xiang Yu and the imperial house of the Qin belonged to an aristocratic class whose origins can be traced back before the Warring States period (475–221 BCE). Liu Bang, by contrast, came from a peasant family and was serving as a neighborhood head at the end of the Qin dynasty. Almost all his subordinates in the rebellion—from major advisors to strategists and military commanders—rose from humble circumstances. When the Western Han was established, these meritorious officials were rewarded with leading posts in the central court and ennobled as kings and marquises. Under Liu Bang, later known as Emperor Gaozu (r. 202–195 BCE), 100 percent of the top officials—the Three Dukes and Nine Ministers (*sanggong jiuqiu* 三公九卿) in the central court—were meritorious men who had helped to establish the regime. Under Gaozu's successors, Empress Dowager Lü 呂太后 (Emperor Hui 惠), Emperor Wen 文 (r. 180–157 BCE), and Emperor Jing 景 (r. 157–141 BCE), the percentage of meritorious officials in the central court decreased to 90 percent, 62 percent, and 46 percent of the recorded high officials, respectively. Their positions were filled by their children, relatives of the emperors' concubines, and military leaders who had distinguished themselves in the recent campaigns. A few men from obscure background reached the top of the bureaucratic hierarchy by demonstrating administrative merit.

This newly created ruling group saw another rupture at the midpoint of the dynasty. In 91 BCE, Emperor Wu 武 (r. 141–87 BCE), who had been on the throne for half a century, was tortured by illness and old age. He grew convinced that his sickness was caused by black magic and dispatched Jiang Chong 江充, a trusted official, to track down those who