

THE FIRST EMPEROR OF CHINA

It was one man who founded the great nation of China. His name was Qin Shihuang, the First Emperor. He not only gave China its name, but also founded the longest-enduring nation state in the history of the world.

The First Emperor of China chronicles the period of Qin Shihuang's rule. Much of the story has never been told before, and few Westerners are aware of his incredible achievements.

From the grandiose inner sanctum of Emperor Qin's royal palace, to fierce battles with feudal kings, this historical drama re-creates the glory and the terror of the Qin Dynasty. The film includes the first documentary footage of Qin's life-sized terra cotta army, constructed almost 2,200 years ago for his tomb.

As the vast and secret land of China opens more of its doors to western eyes, there is a growing curiosity about the history and traditions of this nation of 1.2 billion people. **The First Emperor of China** offers viewers a unique opportunity to increase their understanding of the nature of ancient Chinese civilization and its extraordinary achievements.

**This video contains some violent scenes.
Viewer discretion is advised.**

**Directors: Tony Ianzelo • Liu Hao Xue
Producers: Barrie Howells • Pan Han Ci**

A National Film Board of Canada/China Xi'an Film Studio
co-production in association with
the Canadian Museum of Civilization

42 minutes
Order number: 0189 071

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A NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA RELEASE



THE FIRST EMPEROR OF CHINA

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秦始皇帝

VHS

0189 071



THE FIRST EMPEROR OF CHINA

The year is 246 B.C. and China is at war. Ying Zheng, the young ruler of Qin, is waging ruthless battles against neighboring states. However, at home, revolution is in the air, for in this corrupt and dangerous court of intrigue, the young King's control over the kingdom of Qin is tentative — his reform measures meet with resistance. The ensuing coup attempt led by his advisors is foiled and the leaders of the rebellion are executed. Having established complete control within his own state, the King presses on with his military campaigns abroad.

After years of battle and an assassination attempt, Qin orders a final assault on the state of Qi, the last nation to fall to his army. In victory, he declares himself Qin Shihuang — "First Emperor." For the first time in history, China is unified.

To consolidate his vast conquests, Qin institutes sweeping reforms. He unifies the system of measures and currency, standardizes the written language, and lays out a radiating system of roads and canals for transportation. Yet, life in the new empire is harsh. More than 700,000 slaves are organized into huge labor gangs to join together in the construction of the Great Wall of China. Hundreds of thousands more are drafted to work on Qin's 270 palaces and his burial tomb. Thousands of books are burned in a scourge against freedom of thought; scholars who voice opposition are buried alive.

After several attempts on his life, Qin Shihuang becomes obsessed with death and has his alchemists prepare a potion that would make him immortal. The elixirs he ingests to achieve everlasting life contain poisonous chemicals such as mercury, lead and arsenic. When Qin eventually dies, Eunuch Zhao Gao and Prime Minister Li Si secretly engineer the suicide of Qin's oldest son, and enthrone a younger — and weaker — son.

Qin's Dynasty, predicted to last "ten thousand generations," survives his own death by only four years. Yet the Imperial system he created endured for more than 2,000 years, proving to be one of the world's most durable political structures.

The story ends in contemporary China where Qin's "guardian army" is slowly being excavated. In 1974, well-diggers in China's Shaanxi Province stumbled upon a huge subterranean vault — the forgotten tomb of Emperor Qin. Within the underground chamber, archaeologists discovered an extraordinary treasure: an army of 7,000 life-sized terra cotta men, horses and chariots. The uniform rows of clay soldiers, each with a distinctly different face, appear life-like, poised in time, as if they are waiting for a signal from the Emperor himself.

PULL OUT FOR MORE INFORMATION

Directors

Tony Janzelo
Liu Hao Xue

Writers

Wong Ji Cheng
Liu Yun Hui

Art Director

Qian Yun Xuan

Music

Eldon Rathburn
Zhao Ji Ping

Narration written by

Robert Duncan

Narration

**Christopher
Plummer**

Producers

Barrie Howells
Pan Han Ci

Associate Producers

Margaret Wong
Wong Guo Ren

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THEMES FOR DISCUSSION

China has enriched the culture of the world with her science and technology, her arts and her philosophy. The achievements of the First Emperor symbolize the heights reached in his own time by those whom he called "The Black-haired People."

In only 36 years of rule, Qin Shihuang achieved what few others have accomplished, and, if historical comparisons are to be made, such people as Alexander the Great, Napoleon, and Julius Caesar come to mind. Qin Shihuang was a man of "firsts," and in a real sense, the maker of China.

The following themes to watch for in the film are but a few of Qin Shihuang's "firsts." Which of these firsts are in evidence today, either in their original form, or in a modified version?

•The Dragon Motif

In Chinese mythology, the "lung," or dragon, is essentially a benevolent divinity and is held in high regard. The dragon is the rain-bringer, the master of waters and clouds. During the time of Qin Shihuang, a theory existed known as "The Five Elements." According to this theory, fire, water, earth, wood and metal succeeded each other in an endless cycle, each destroying its predecessor. Qin Shihuang chose water as his element. He likened himself to the dragon, "the master of the waters," a super-human, a demi-god. Since water was considered a cold and harsh element, he determined his law would also be harsh and repressive and his rule, severe. He came to be known as "The Emperor of the Dragon Throne."

•Qin Dynasty Warfare

Prior to the Qin Dynasty, the principal weapon of war was the war chariot, a heavy, clumsy vehicle. Qin introduced mounted cavalymen, armed with crossbows and swords, for greater mobility. In fact, the arrangement of terra cotta soldiers found in Qin Shihuang's tomb suggest a formal arrangement similar to that of nineteenth-century western armies. The main body was composed of infantry, while a smaller, more mobile force of mounted troops was detached to act separately, and a command unit oversaw the whole operation. Rank was awarded according to accomplishment, not social status, and insubordination was severely punished. Soldiers were equipped with superbly designed weapons; most were made of cast bronze, an alloy of copper and tin, surface-treated with chrome — a method not discovered by Europeans until the 1930s.

•Qin's Chinese Script

In 221 B.C., seven warring states — Qin, Yan, Qi, Zhao, Han, Wei, and Chu — were united by Qin Shihuang, albeit at great human cost. The imposition of a greater degree of cultural unity became Qin's primary task. Each state had developed its own form of artistic expression, folklore, metallurgy, coinage, script, etc. A dictionary of newly-standardized forms, consisting of 3,300 characters, was created, providing the standard for all further evolution of written Chinese script. It is ironic that an emperor so dedicated to written communication should later be the first to order a "Burning of the Books."

•Qin's Code of Law

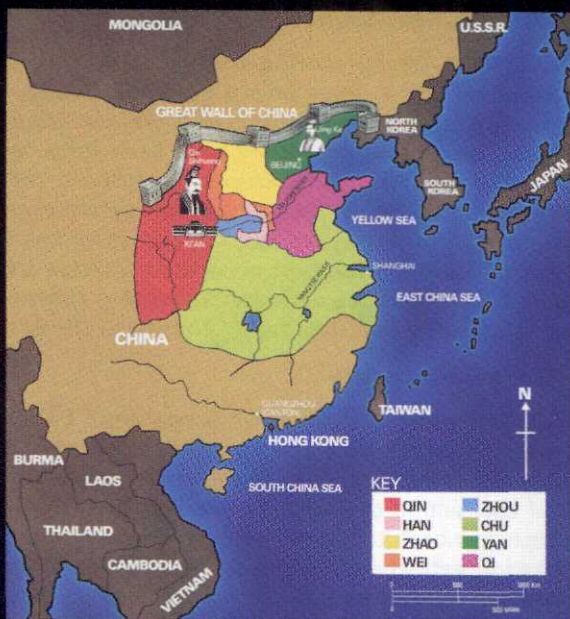
Qin Shihuang, a student of "Legalism," believed that man was by nature evil, and that harsh law was the most effective regulator of human behavior. He established the first Code of Law with a centralized bureaucracy. In this code, the presumption was "guilty until proven innocent." Torture was permitted to extract confessions and punishments were physically severe. Murder, infanticide and injuring a fellow citizen were considered serious crimes. There were many convictions of people who unwittingly broke the complicated Code of Law. These people considered their punishment unjust, and many of them finally rebelled.

•The Great Wall

Prior to Qin's reign, seven states had constructed walls to protect their northern borders from the nomadic Steppe tribes. When Qin Shihuang ordered the building of the Great Wall, it was both a consolidation of earlier walls and an extension. Begun in 221 B.C., with a work force of more than 300,000 soldiers and thousands of convicts, the Wall took ten years to be completed and covered 4,100 kilometers. Working through brutally cold winters and blazing summers, thousands of workers died. The Wall is an incredible engineering feat, but it is known in China as "The Wall of Tears," and "The Longest Graveyard in the World."

THE TIME LINE

The enclosed time line shows periods when different classical empires existed in China, Europe and in the Americas. What was happening in Rome, Athens, and the Americas while Qin was building his empire? Do you see parallel events, inventions or developments?



A MAP STUDY

The factors that best explain the growth and development of the ancient Chinese civilization require examination in terms of geographical advantages and limitations. Use the map provided above to show the growth of the Qin Empire. You will also need a detailed map of China's geographical features to help explore the geographical reasons for Qin's growth. The discussion may be directed through one or more of the following tasks:

On the map, locate the eight Warring States that existed before Qin Shihuang's unification of China.

In the film, an assassination attempt is made on Qin by Jing Ke, the general from the State of Yan. Locate the Warring State of Yan on the map and explain why that province was of strategic importance to Qin.

After exploring the geographical factors for the expansion of the Qin Dynasty, examine Qin's methods of physically, psychologically and sociologically unifying the great Empire of China.

Trace the routes of expansion of the Qin Dynasty.

Trace the Great Wall, the northern border of the Qin Empire. How did the topography and climate of the area affect the construction of the Great Wall?

On a detailed map of China, locate the major rivers, ports and cities of China. Compare the China of the Qin Dynasty to the borders of China today — what are the differences?