

# A Biography of Qin Shi Huang: First Emperor of China

Part I - by Kallie Szczepanski

This handout is adapted from this website: <https://www.thoughtco.com/qin-shi-huang-first-emperor-china-195679>

## Introduction



Qin Shi Huang was the First Emperor of a unified China and ruled from 246 BCE to 210 BCE. During his 35-year reign, he managed to create several magnificent **construction** projects. Although his reign led to phenomenal cultural and **intellectual** growth in China, it also resulted in a great deal of **destruction**. Whether he should be remembered more for his creative and innovative ideas or for his **tyrannical** actions is a matter of **dispute**. Nevertheless, historians generally agree that Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of the Qin **Dynasty**, was one of the most important rulers in Chinese history.

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## Words and Meanings I

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1

a Find two underlined words in the text above that have opposite meanings.

c             
and

b Find a synonym for **argument** in the text above:

c Which word above refers to **intelligence and the ability to reason**?

d Find a synonym for **cruel, dictatorial and merciless**.

e Which word refers to **a hereditary line of kings**?

2

Which of the words below fits into each sentence?

birth • construction • dynasty • ruthless

a Nero was a cruel and  emperor who often acted in a tyrannical manner. This pattern of behaviour is also evident in the life of Qin Shi Huang.

b In a dynasty, power is conferred by . This means that power is usually passed from father to son. This is a hereditary form of power.

c The school received just enough money from the government to build two new classrooms. This was sadly a rather limited  project.

d When a king dies without an heir, the  comes to an end.

# The Early Life of Qin Shi Huang

According to **legend**, a rich merchant named Lu Buwei befriended a prince of the Qin State during the latter years of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty (770-256 BCE). The merchant's wife, Zhao Ji, had just fallen pregnant, so he arranged for the prince to meet and fall in love with her. She became the prince's **concubine** and then gave birth to Lu Buwei's child in 259 BCE.

The baby was named Ying Zheng. The prince believed the baby was his own. Ying Zheng became king of the **Qin** state in 246 BCE, upon the death of his supposed father. He ruled as Qin Shi Huang and **unified** China for the first time.

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## Words and Meanings 2

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3 Match the terms from the text with their meanings.

- |             |                       |                       |  |
|-------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--|
| a legend    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | → joined as one  |
| b concubine | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | → pronounced “chin”; the origin of the word “China”                                |
| c Qin       | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | → myth; a story that is not necessarily true but that is well known and often told |
| d unified   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | → a woman who lives with a man but has a lower status than his wife or wives       |

## Early Reign

The young king was only 13 years old when he took the throne, so his prime minister (and probably his real father), Lu Buwei, acted as **regent** for the first eight years. This was a difficult time for any ruler in China, with seven **warring** states **vying** for control of the land.

The leaders of the Qi, Yan, Zhao, Han, Wei, Chu and Qin states were former lords under the Zhou Dynasty but had each proclaimed themselves king as the Zhou dynasty collapsed.

In this **unstable** environment, warfare **flourished**.

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## Words and Meanings 3

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4 Match the terms from the text with their meanings.

- |              |                       |                       |  |
|--------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--|
| a regent     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | constantly fighting  |
| b warring    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | grew, developed easily or quickly                                |
| c vying      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | prone to sudden changes, not fixed, likely to change or give way |
| d unstable   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | a person who rules in the place of a young king or queen         |
| e flourished | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | competing for something  |