

SHIHUANGDI

As China grew and went through one dynasty after another, Emperors sought a way to unite the civilization and bring stability. Early dynasties were very weak, and fell from power quickly. One man was finally able to gain major control over China in 221 B.C. His name was Shihuangdi, and was China's first true emperor. His contributions would help to shape the development of China for many years after his death.

Shihuangdi first came to power around 221 B.C. His original name was Zheng, but he soon took the name Shihuangdi meaning "First Emperor". He had boasted that his dynasty would last for 10,000 generations. He called his dynasty the Qin (pronounced "chin") after his homeland. He was a very strict ruler, and feared by many of his subjects. Shihuangdi did however have grand ideas for his new empire.

One of the first things Shihuangdi wanted to do was to protect his new empire from enemies. To do this meant to protect the vast borders China shared with other civilizations. Shihuangdi's solution to this problem was to order the additional construction to the Great Wall of China. Previous rulers already had small walls constructed. To improve upon this, Shihuangdi ordered these existing walls to be connected. Historians estimate that as many as 300,000 workers helped in the construction of the Great wall. There were even rumors that workers who fell asleep on the job or died, were buried within the wall itself!! When they were done, the wall stretched over 1400 miles. It was the largest construction project any culture in the world had ever undertaken.

To protect the empire from the *inside*, Shihuangdi needed to put down any rebellions against him. The construction of hundreds of miles of new roads was ordered. This allowed for the quicker movement of his soldiers in times of trouble. The empire was divided into districts and Shihuangdi appointed his most trusted officials to run the districts and report back to him. This kept him aware of any possible uprisings in his empire. The new system of roads not only helped his armies, but trade improved as travel time between cities was shortened due to the newer roads.

China was one of the first civilizations to use a form of currency, (money) in the world. A problem with this in China was that different areas used different forms of money, so trade could be difficult at times. Shihuangdi organized a single system (centralized) of currency for his new empire, greatly improving trade and the economy. He also set a standard system of weights and measures for trade as well.

China also had a well-developed form of writing. However, the same problem with the old currency also existed with the old system of writing. It was too different from one region of China to the next. So just as he had done with currency, Shihuangdi organized China to have one single system of writing. Like the new single system of currency, this dramatically improved communication around the empire. He even set one code of laws for his subjects to follow throughout the empire, much the same as Hammurabi had done in Mesopotamia.

