

The Qin Dynasty

Focus Question: What caused the fall of the Qin Dynasty?

Setup

“Under the leadership of the ‘first emperor’ Shi Huang, the Qin Dynasty briefly united all of China under dynastic rule from 221 B.C.E. to 206 B.C.E..”

Textbook

A modern history textbook summarizes Qin Shi Huang’s **tyrannical rule** and the resulting **loss of respect from his subjects**. “The first emperor” ended the power of local lords, appointed educated men to administrative positions, and imposed censorship on his people by breaking ties to the past. Although his ‘legalist’ ideology laid out the foundations for future empires to follow, Shi Huang failed as a ruler, losing of the ‘mandate of heaven.’ (Doc. A)

Confucian Essay

As a member of the newly empowered Han Dynasty, who had helped to overthrow the previous Qin Dynasty, Confucian poet Jia Ya examines the mistakes of the previous dynasty in order to better advise the Han in their quest to maintain dynastic control over China. Ya contends that Qin leadership were **power hungry** and **failed to govern with a sense of “humaneness and rightness.”** He seems to suggest that in order to bring “peace and quiet to the world” the Han must **“reduce harsh punishments...taxation...and alleviate (the) oppression”** that characterized the Qin Dynasty. (Doc. B)

Newspaper Article

Amid the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, Chinese government officials looked to the nation’s traditional past to guide their political efforts of censorship. Writing for the “Enlightenment Daily” newspaper, T’an Hsiao-Wen draws comparisons between the contemporary Communist government and the classic Qin Dynasty. Whereas many had claimed that the harsh rules and punishments laid out by Shi Huang were to blame for the short-lived dynasty in the 3rd century B.C.E., Hsiao-Wen argued the **legalist reforms did not go far enough**. In an attempt to justify communist censorship and expanded control, he seems to think that **if the Qin had fought harder to put down opposition**, much of which came from the “wealthy families,” they would have remained in power. (Doc. C)

Overall Claim

Using military power and force, Qin Shi Huang, was able to briefly unite China during the Warring States Period. In order to maintain political control a series of harsh rules and punishments known as legalism was enacted by the Qin Dynasty. Despite some who suggest the Qin should have been more strict in their control of oppositional forces within China, ultimately the unforgiving and punitive nature of legalism failed to sustain national unity and support of the people, resulting in the collapse of the Qin Dynasty.