

Chapter 4 Viewpoint Activity

Although the First Emperor unified China (textbook pages 93–94), later writers harshly criticized the policies of the Qin (once spelled Ch'in). Here two Han historians look back at the Qin. The first selection is from an essay on “The Faults of Ch'in ” by the statesman Chia Yi (201–169 B.C.). It explains why a common soldier could overthrow the dynasty with a badly equipped peasant army. The second essay was written to the Han emperor Wudi. In it, the historian Tung Chung-shu points to the Qin rulers as a bad influence. ♦ *As you read, think about which writer is the more critical of the previous dynasty. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

The Faults of the Qin Dynasty

Chia Yi Now the empire of Ch'in [Qin] at this time was by no means small or feeble. . . . And yet Ch'en She succeeded in his undertaking where [earlier lords] had failed. Why was this, when in ability, size, power, and strength his forces came nowhere near those of the states of the east that had formerly opposed [it]? Ch'in [Qin], beginning with an insignificant amount of territory, reached the power of a great state and for a hundred years made all the great lords pay homage to it. Yet after it had become master of the whole empire . . . , a single commoner opposed it and its ancestral temples toppled, its ruler died by the hands of men, and it became the laughingstock of the world. Why? Because it failed to rule with humanity and righteousness and to realize that the power to attack and the power to retain what one has thereby won are not the same.

Tung Chung-shu The Ch'in [Qin] regime . . . made what was bad, worse. It banned books and punished book owners. It downgraded the virtue of propriety and righteousness which it detested and

would have liked to destroy all the saintly ways of ancient times if it could. The result was a self-serving, most arrogant dictatorship that placed power and profit above love and righteousness. It is no wonder that it lasted only fourteen years.

Since history began, there has never been a regime as brutal as the Ch'in [Qin] that attempted to cure violence with violence and subjected all of its citizens to a reign of terror. Even today the traces of its poison can still be seen. Our customs remain bad; our people continue to be untruthful in words and outrageous in conduct. Most regrettably, they are so stubborn in adhering to the old ways that they refuse to make changes for the better. Confucius says, “You cannot sculpture a piece of rotten wood; nor can you paint a wall made of manure.” This is the unhappy situation we are facing today.

“It banned books
and punished book
owners.”

Source: (1) “The Faults of Ch'in” in *Anthology of Chinese Literature*, ed. Cyril Birch (Grove Press, 1965); (2) “The Harmony between Heaven and Man,” in *The Civilization of China*, trans. Dun J. Li (Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1975).

Questions to Discuss

1. What characteristics and actions of the Qin rulers do these writers criticize?
2. According to Chia Yi, how did its policies lead to the Qin’s downfall? How does this relate to the idea of the Mandate of Heaven?
3. **Determining Relevance** The second historian blames the Qin not only for its own problems but for the influences it still has. What are they? How do these problems relate to Qin policies?