

# SHI HUANGDI

c. 259 BC–210 BC



**HOW HE AFFECTED THE REGION** Shi Huangdi was a powerful Qin emperor in China's first dynasty. He ordered the building of the Great Wall of China and had thousands of terra-cotta warriors made to guard his tomb.



*As you read the biography below, look for ways that Shi Huangdi's strength and determination helped him accomplish many achievements during his reign as emperor.*

Shi Huangdi's name at birth was Cheng. Cheng was crowned king of the Qin, a Chinese state, at the age of 13, but his rule did not become official until he turned 21. His first act as ruler was to begin taking over the other six Chinese states one at a time. Cheng was a strong military leader. He often made **ruthless** decisions in order to take control of the enemy states.

In 221 BC, China became unified for the first time. Cheng renamed himself Shi Huangdi, meaning First Emperor. He was very confident in his abilities as a leader. He **proclaimed** that his dynasty would last "10,000 generations."

Shi Huangdi earned many lasting achievements during his reign. He ordered the Great Wall to be built. This was to protect China from war clans in the north. Shi Huangdi adopted a single form of money to be used throughout China. It was a round copper coin with a square hole in the middle. Irrigation canals and roads were built all over the empire. The Qin even established one language to be spoken and written by all people in China.



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## VOCABULARY

**ruthless** cruel

**proclaimed** announced

Even though Shi Huangdi accomplished many great things, he was not a popular leader. His people worked hard to build the Great Wall, dig irrigation canals, and build a huge palace for Shi Huangdi. They did not get paid for this work. The Qin emperor also ordered more than 6,000 life-sized warriors to be made out of terra cotta. These hand-made figures were meant to guard Shi Huangdi's tomb after his death.

Eventually, Shi Huangdi stayed in his palace almost all the time. He would only speak to a small number of trusted people in person for fear that someone might try to kill him. He had already survived three attempts on his life.

Shi Huangdi died suddenly in 210 BC. He had ruled as the first emperor of unified China for 37 years. The accomplishments of Shi Huangdi left a lasting mark on Chinese culture. His determination and ideas for changes made China very strong. The Qin dynasty was the foundation for all future emperors.

### WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

- 1. Recall** Identify three lasting achievements of Shi Huangdi.

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- 2. Draw a Conclusion** Why did Shi Huangdi fear for his life toward the end of his reign?

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### ACTIVITY

Write an epitaph for Shi Huangdi's tomb. Include one or two details that you learned from your reading.