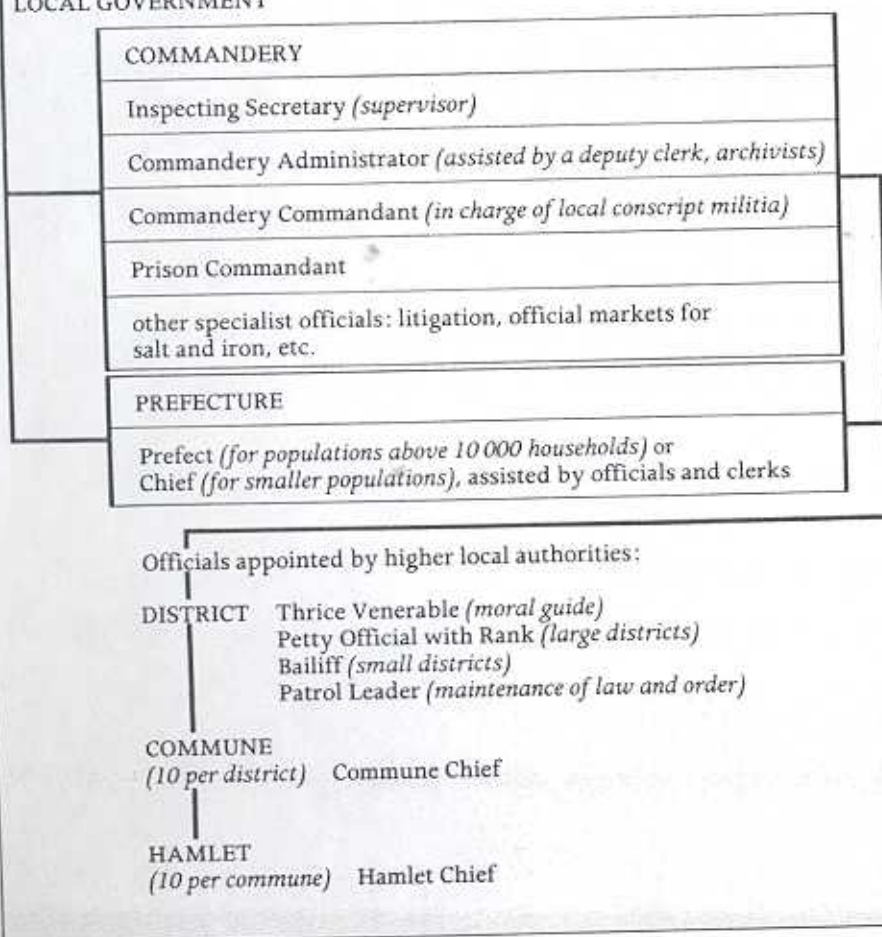


## LOCAL GOVERNMENT



even Daoist ideas. The emperor is at the same time the wielder of magical moral powers, who vivifies both the human and the natural world, the supreme educator, and a hardworking disciplinarian giving precise, explicit shape to institutions and undertakings, his right to do so justified by the benefits that he confers on ordinary people. The passion for social uniformity is also evident and so is the belief in the importance of hard work and decorum:

He makes rules and measures just and fair;  
He is the regulator of all beings.  
He thus illumines the affairs of men,  
And brings son and father together in concord.  
His sage's wisdom, altruism and justice  
Make bright and clear the principles of the Way.

The merit of the emperor  
Is toiling diligently at basic matters.  
He exalts farming, ends derivative occupations;  
It is the black-haired folk whom he enriches. . .

Vessels and tools have identical measurements,  
Documents are written in a single script.  
Wherever sun and moon shine down,  
Wherever boats and carts proceed,  
Everyone lives out his allotted span,  
And there is no one but attains to his desires.

The other inscriptions add a few new emphases. The encomium on Mount Zhifu talks of the "emperor's sorrow for the masses" and how he had "been the salvation of the black-haired folk." That cut on the gates of the city of Jieshi depicts the sovereign as giving even its physical shape to the world, at least in some measure:

He had both inner and outer walls pulled down,  
And waterways and dikes were opened;  
Leveled away were the dangerous defiles.

Once the form of the land had been determined,  
The black-haired multitudes had no corvée labor,  
And all below Heaven were cherished.

The inscription carved on Mount Guiji in the southeast shows the ruler's right and duty to frame binding definitions.

When the sage of Qin succeeded to the dynastic government  
He first determined punishments and categories,  
And clearly set forth the old standards.

He first made equitable rules and model forms,  
Distinguishing, after inquiry, between each post and duty,  
So as to establish routine norms. . .

He sets into motion and regulates the multitude of things;  
He scrutinizes the substance of events,  
That each may bear its proper name. . .

With only slight changes, this general conception of what a supreme ruler should be like has dominated the Chinese political imagination down to and including the time of Chairman Mao Zedong.



### The way of government

This was the rhetoric. What were the distinctive features of the early Chinese empire considered as a working political system?

First and foremost, it was a bureaucracy. That is to say, it was a political, administrative and military machine the component parts of which were human beings assigned to perform particular functions and selected for their presumed ability to do so. It was paid for by compulsory taxes and labor-services levied from a registered population. In its essential conception it was therefore opposed to feudalism, considered as a system of power devolved from superiors to inferiors on the basis of lifelong and usually inherited loyalties and obligations that existed, or were supposed to exist, between individuals as individuals, typically lords and vassals. The major exception to the ban on the inheritance of political power was of course the imperial position itself; there were a few other minor privileges passed on from one generation to the next. The bureaucracy was likewise distinct from a household type of government in that specific functions were in principle the responsibility of specific functionaries. Lastly, it was systematized and formalized in that its business was done on the basis of written rules and through the medium of written documents.

Under the First Emperor the rejection of administrative feudalism was explicit. Previous Qin rulers had on occasion practiced various forms of enfeoffment both of high officials and of their own sons. Thus when Lü Buwei was prime minister he had been ennobled as the marquis of Wenxin and given 100 000 households in the Luoyang area "to eat," as the contemporary term so bluntly described what may be called a "revenue fief" (as opposed to one administered by the recipient). The experience of the pre-unification rulers with the institution of administrative feudalism had been far from comfortable. One royal prince who had been made marquis of Shu (in conquered Sichuan) had been executed for allegedly plotting rebellion. Early in King Zheng's own reign the newly elevated marquis of Changxin, of whom it was said that in his fief "all matters great and small were decided by him," rose in revolt and was put down with difficulty.

The moment of decision came in 221 BC, when Chancellor (or Prime Minister) Hang Wan and others proposed setting up the emperor's sons as "kings" in the far northeast, the east coast and the central Yangzi on the grounds that these places were far away and that there would otherwise be no means of controlling them. This suggestion was successfully attacked by Li Si in a famous speech:

The sons and younger brothers and other agnatic relatives to whom Kings Wen and Wu of the Zhou dynasty gave fiefs were extremely numerous. Subsequently the links between them grew loose and they became estranged, attacking each other as if they were enemies. Even more did the feudal lords [of the Springs and Autumns period] exterminate each other. The Zhou Son of Heaven was incapable of stopping them. Today, through your majesty's divine magical powers, the lands within the seas have been united, and all are commanderies of prefectures. The royal princes and

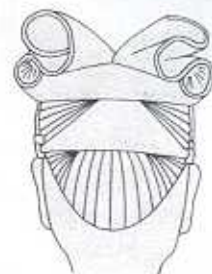
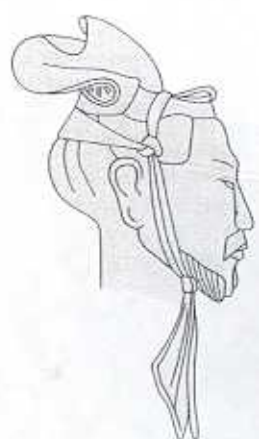
meritorious officials should have bestowed upon them rich rewards drawn from the state's tax revenues. Since they will then be easy to control, and there will be no divergent ideas in the empire, this is the way to secure peace. Setting up lordships will not lead to this end.

In 213 BC several Confucian scholars proposed that feudalism should be restored. They argued that the Shang and the Zhou dynasty had owed their long survival to their enfeoffing their junior relatives to serve as "props and cart-supports" of the royal house. They concluded, "We have never heard of anything lasting long that did not take antiquity as its teacher." Li Si countered by saying that times were continually changing, and that "if the scholars do not take the present as their teacher but instead study the past, using it to criticize the present age, they will confuse the black-haired people and throw them into disorder." This led to one of the barbaric acts of policy for which Li Si and the First Emperor have been hated ever since. With the exception of books on farming, medicine and divination, all writings on philosophy and all historical records except those of the state of Qin were systematically destroyed, and the execution was ordered of anyone who ventured to quote them.

This did not mean the end of feudal tendencies in Inner China. The Han dynasty, which was much weaker in its early years than the Qin had been, felt obliged to reintroduce a number of apanages for imperial relatives and supporters of the new house. Seven of these semi-independent kingdoms rose in revolt in 154 BC, and after they had been suppressed the bureaucratic principle was reimposed on the feudal areas. Much of Chinese political history for the next thousand years or so can be seen as a tug-of-war in practice between locally based, and often hereditary, powerholders and an administration trying to assert an effective central control. This struggle took many forms, and the fortunes of the sides varied greatly from time to time, while the basic superiority of the centralizing principle to some extent also remained open to doubt. As late as the early 9th century AD, a time when much of the country was dominated by semi-independent military governors, the philosopher Liu Zongyuan felt impelled to write an essay "On Feudalism," insisting on the value of a bureaucratic state. Even in 1052 a leading official could propose, though not successfully as it turned out, that official rank should be given to rich landlords who trained armies of private retainers.

The titles and functions of the officials of the Qin empire were, historically speaking, a composite formed of earlier Zhou practice, general Warring States practice and Qin innovation. There is not enough information to make clear the precise lines of authority, but the general structure of central government, of ministries and of local government is shown in the table on page 81. The system of army ranks was quite straightforward in principle: under the generals, each of whom had a chief clerk, there were colonels-in-chief, commandants, majors and captains.

As a distinctive system of local administration the prefecture or *xian* (a term which is probably related to the word meaning "suspended from") seems to have begun in areas newly acquired by the Chinese





states from other Chinese states. The rather later beginnings of the larger commandery or *jun* (another old term, and cognate with that for "lordship") seem to have been in certain frontier regions facing non-Chinese barbarians. It was the Qin contribution to systematize and universalize these bureaucratic structures. The actual number of commanderies in the empire is controversial. A commonly quoted figure is 36 at the time of reunification, but it may have risen as high as 49 later in the dynasty.

Within three years of the First Emperor's death in 210 BC this remarkable system had collapsed. Revolts among conscripted laborers led to a short period of civil war between rival contenders for supremacy, and ended with the rise of the new dynasty of the Han in 206 BC. There were two main reasons for the downfall of the Qin. The first was the increasingly pathological nature of political life at the court, which crippled the formation of sensible policies and eventually the execution of policy as well. The second was economic overstrain. The resources of the early empire were not able to maintain the costs of the large-scale military campaigns, of building strategic roads and the Great Wall, and of other public works such as the First Emperor's palaces and his colossal mausoleum on which 700 000 conscripts are said to have labored and in which they were buried alive to guard its secrets.

The roots of the degradation of the political process may be traced to the First Emperor's megalomania, his growing intolerance of criticism and the side-effects of the superstitious credulity which inspired his search for the secrets of personal physical immortality. All these can be seen in his famous outburst of rage on learning of the flight of a scholar called Lu, whom he had put in charge of discovering the drugs that conferred eternal life, but who had decided – or so the Han dynasty *Records of the Grand Historian* say – that such an emperor was unfit for such a privilege.

I destroyed all the useless books in the world [the emperor declared]. I summoned to court a multitude of scholars versed in literature and in magical techniques. I hoped thereby to bring about an age of great well-being. The alchemists I wished to purify themselves so that they might seek for magical drugs. Now I hear that Han Zhong and the others [who went with him on the quest for elixirs] have gone off without returning to report, and that Xu Fu's company [who set sail to find the islands of the immortals] have squandered vast sums of money, without in the end getting any magic drugs. Every day I hear of nothing but profits made by trickery and mutual denunciations. I have honored scholar Lu and his associates with rich gifts, but now they are slandering me. The burden of their complaint is that I am without charismatic virtue. As to the scholars in the capital, Xianyang, I have sent out people to investigate them, and some of them appear to be throwing the common folk into confusion with their weird and improper talk.

There was an inquiry conducted by the grandee secretary, during which these scholars tried to save

themselves by denouncing each other. The emperor then had more than 460 of them buried alive and "caused the world to know of it, that it might be a warning to their successors." This was perhaps the first instance of a tendency that has resurfaced from time to time in China ever since, namely the temporary killing of cultural life by the central government through a mixture of monopoly, inquisition and purges. But the most serious immediate consequence for the Qin was that the able crown prince was banished to the frontier for protesting that dealing in this way with scholars, "all of whom praise and model themselves on Confucius," was not the right way to keep the newly conquered empire at peace. Once the First Emperor had died, this banishment made it possible for the eunuch Zhao Gao to contrive the crown prince's suicide, rig the succession and seize power. The consequence was the total corruption of the court, well symbolized by the famous story of the stag. Zhao Gao wanted to know which of the officials were his supporters and therefore presented the emperor with a stag that he declared was a horse. Those who spoke the truth, and insisted it was nonetheless a stag, he had punished. Shortly afterwards he forced the new emperor to commit suicide. The nervous third emperor then had the eunuch assassinated, but survived on the throne for a mere 46 days before the rebels broke into Xianyang.

Qin institutions had extended state income by creating and then taxing a free peasantry, the indispensable adjunct of the effective bureaucratic state. In the regions that Qin conquered the new rulers deliberately broke the power of the indigenous aristocracies by removing the peasants from their communities and setting them up as individual farmers who owed taxes, labor and military services directly to the government. The sense that this gave the Qin kings of a capacity to do things hitherto impossible was very likely exhilarating, but it probably undermined the First Emperor's awareness that there were still limits. In particular, the maintenance of the several hundreds of thousands of soldiers who were sent against the Xiongnu barbarians to the north and west of the great loop of the Yellow River, at the end of difficult supply lines, imposed a fearful logistical strain. In the end, as the *Han History* said, "although the men toiled at farming, there was not enough grain for rations; and the women could not spin enough yarn for the tents. The common people were ruined."

The Qin epoch, however brief, marked a cultural divide in Chinese history. The destruction of books and the compulsory reform of the script meant that almost all the old writings were imperfectly transmitted to later ages, or lost altogether. On the other hand it also saw the definitive establishment of a blueprint of administration that, however imperfectly realized at times, and however much subject to changes in details of titles and institutions, was to change remarkably little in the next two millennia. Perhaps its most important feature was summed up by the Tang essayist Liu Zongyuan. The First Emperor, he said, was "the man who, for the first time in history, introduced and put into practice an administrative apparatus so just and impartial that all men, if qualified, could participate in it."

ent types of armor denoted on and rank. The structured drawing (left), the Qin dynasty officer emperor's bodyguard, dated from pit 2 (see 1-87), shows an elaborately bonnet secured under the by a flamboyant bow. The is also distinguished by its or height and more intricate armor tunic which is ated by smaller bows at the back and shoulders.