THE TERRACOTTA ARMY: A SYMBOL OF THE LIFE AND BELIEFS OF QIN SHI HUANGDI
Art History and Humanities
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Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi (259-210 BC) was obsessed with immortality. The moment he ascended the throne he ordered a massive tomb built so that if eternal life was not obtained in his lifetime, he would still have his position and status in the spirit realm. The only way to retain his imperial position after death was to build what he had in life for his afterlife. His tomb included a massive underground palace, a night sky inlaid with jewels, and rivers of mercury that represented the real rivers surrounding his palace. Since his death, the contents of his tomb have come to symbolize his mortal reign and his desire for immortality in the spirit world. However, nothing symbolizes these more effectively than his Terracotta Army.

Symbolism in art, especially when looking at the Terracotta Army, is a unique tool that allows one to further expand the scope of his or her understanding and gain a better perspective of the ideas and beliefs that are connected to specific artwork. From the beginning of humanity, symbols have been used to provide links between theology, spirituality and culture.\(^1\) The Terracotta Army is an example of how one man conveyed his ideology into material form.

While the army itself is a magnificent sight and has the ability to satisfy the taste of beauty and splendor to all who appreciate art, the significance of the Terracotta Army goes well beyond just aesthetics. As a whole, the army is a symbol of the eternal power Qin Shi Huangdi, the first emperor of China, craved. In this lifetime Qin Shi Huangdi used his military to brutally obtain dominion over territories around him, and continued to rely on his military to make sure his title as supreme ruler went unchallenged. After death, the emperor’s terracotta warriors became his army. This clay army is evidence to the First Emperor’s belief of an afterlife and to his belief that he would continue to rule as an emperor. Just like Qin Shi Huangdi’s army in this

life, the Terracotta Army was created to protect, serve and to keep his position as an eternal emperor in the spirit world.

In this paper, historical texts of secondary sources, such as the classical texts of Sima Qian, will be used to examine first, how the Terracotta Army symbolizes China’s beginnings. The role of an army was vital for Qin Shi Huangdi in overcoming enemies by expanding territory. The Military became such a pivotal feature in Qin Shi Huangdi’s empire that characteristics of his fierce army became central to the environment he ruled. Next, the paper will consider how the Terracotta Army symbolizes Qin Shi Huangdi’s sovereignty and personality. Violence was the key in conquering the other kingdoms surrounding Qin Shi Huangdi. He used this same strategy in war to rule his new empire that displayed his character and behavior as a despot.

Lastly, this paper will discuss how the Terracotta Army symbolized Qin Shi Huangdi’s fear of death and his belief of an afterlife. Qin Shi Huangdi had such an intense fear of death that he ordered magicians to find immortals that could grant him immortality. If this plan did not work, the first emperor ordered his tomb to be filled with spirit vessels that would accompany him in the afterlife to appear as though he was living as an immortal in this world. Addressing these areas of the ancient Chinese culture and history will show that the Terracotta Army is not just statues, but the very heart of Qin Shi Huangdi and his China.

The Terracotta Army Symbolizes China’s Beginnings

In 1974, a major discovery was made by Mr. Yang, a farmer, who was digging a well in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, China, when he struck the clay head of a terracotta warrior.² The

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discovery of this clay head was only the beginning of what was to be found further under the earth. Archeologists continued digging to uncover more than 7,000 life-sized terracotta warriors strategically placed in three major pits. Upon further research of this army, it was learned that these pits, full of clay warriors, are an extension to Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi’s main tomb. Qin Shi Huangdi was the first emperor of China who completed many accomplishments during his reign. He ordered these clay soldiers to be built and placed west of his tomb, for upon his death they were to stand poised, guarding their emperor in their underground home.

![Figure 1. The Terracotta Army. Beijing Holiday Tour.](image)

The discovery of the warriors caused commotion in the archeological, historical and art worlds, and also stirred interest in the general public as they were uncovered for the world to see. Funerary art, such as the Terracotta Army, was not meant to be seen, but now that they are on display, correlations between it and China’s history are essential to connect for they have come to embody the context under which China became united. The force of military strength was the
lifeblood of Qin Shi Huangdi as his army expanded territory and became the environment in which he inherited his kingdom.

**Expanding Territory Testifies To the Importance of Having an Army**

Expanding territory was the reality of every ancient culture, but the period before China was unified, known as the Warring States Period, honored this practice of conquering and expanding yearly. As the name of this period indicates, this era was characterized by wars between states for the sole purpose of expanding their territory. The very existence of an army in Qin Shi Huangdi’s tomb testifies not only to how crucial an army was to every king and his state, but also the army’s existence is symbolic of the state of Qin and its military achievements during the Warring States Period as its armies expanded and conquered territories. Qin State conquered all the other states, unifying their territories and is where Qin Shi Huangdi hails.

To fully understand how the Terracotta Army symbolizes China’s beginnings through the conquering of territories, we must go back in time to pre-imperial China, to a period known as the Spring and Autumn period. During this period the Zhou dynasty ruled from 770 to about 475 B.C. As a way of ruling, kings would bestow land to their royal families and to those who served them faithfully, such as generals or those who accomplished extraordinary feats. These extravagant gifts would ensure loyalty from the receivers as well as control over a kingdom too large to police. But as the purpose of giving land to prominent people was to guarantee allegiance, it in fact created the opposite effect.

Many states existed within the Zhou territory. Each of them had a feudal lord who was to control the territory on behalf of the king and each had their own distinctive culture, character

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of people and products; their separation was more than geographic.\(^4\) Over time, however, the power of the central government diminished little by little and the states became more independent through their increasing military force. Distance, culture and estranged relationships between the states and the Zhou capitol began to take a toll on the loyalty the lords may have had for their king. Soon, the more powerful states began to claim weaker states around them without permission or even knowledge of the king.

Lust for power began to terrorize the states as constant wars broke out between and within them. By 476 B.C., the Zhou dynasty had no real power to subdue these quarrels. It fell out of rule and the states with the most supremacy swept over their neighbors to expand their territories. The only way to expand territory at this time was to use military force. If a state’s army was weak so was the state and it would be demolished or seized by another with a fiercer, larger army. Thus, the time period between 475 B.C. until 221 B.C. is known as the Warring States Period.

During the Warring States Period, the rise of the Qin state became dominant as its military successes outweighed any loses it encountered. During this era, for a state to exist, survive and expand, it had to have an army large in quantity as this made up the strength of the state. This was an age when numbers counted; military technology, being more or less in equilibrium, did not confer on any contestant a qualitative edge over the others.\(^5\) The 7,000 plus life-sized terracotta warriors symbolize Qin’s ability to expand and conquer other states as its army grew and continued to grow as it claimed more territories from other states.


In the beginning, the Qin state was not big, but it was strong and prosperous. The reason Qin survived was because it was situated far out on the border in the old province of Yong and did not participate in the alliances of the feudal lords of the central states as they were viewed as a barbarian people. Qin’s lack of participation in alliances with feuding states was wise as these alliances were made with “unprincipled” rulers, and were broken more often than not.

Lack of alliances as well as its geographical location bordered in the west, set Qin up to be a force to be reckoned with. A philosopher from the Han Dynasty, Master Huainan (Huainanzì), asserted the Qin state was “enveloped in difficult terrain and belted by the Yellow River, they were cut off on all sides and thus secure. The land was profitable and the topography beneficial, so they accumulated great wealth.” The Qin state had a better opportunity to expand its territory without as much conflict as it was essentially cut off from the other states. The centralized feuding states were landlocked and their only option for expansion was to overthrow neighboring states one city at a time.

As Qin realigned its boundaries and increased in resources, especially in military strength, its rulers began venturing out further to capture cities belonging to their opponents. This is documented in Sima Qian’s book, *Records of the Grand Historian*. Sima Qian was a historian during the early Han dynasty, responsible for piecing together the ancient history of China. According to this record Qin rulers made attacks throughout the Warring States Period, but it wasn’t until later, when Qin really developed into a contending state, that Qin’s army began to attack other cities year after year without hesitation.

An excerpt from Sima Qian’s records bears testimony to Qin’s powerful, large army as prince Dan, from Yan, was a hostage in Qin and escaped because of his treatment while at court.

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When he returned home, he looked for someone to help him take his revenge on the king of Qin, who at this time was Qin Shi Huangdi. Prince Dan realized, because Yan was small and powerless, there was nothing he could do. His army was nothing compared to Qin’s, and his plot of revenge quickly turned cold as he thought about the strength of Qin’s army and its ability to overcome any territory it wanted. He knew that his efforts would be futile as he contemplated how Qin day by day dispatched more troops east of the mountains, attacking Qi, Chu, Hann, Wei, and Zhao, gradually eating away at the lands of the other feudal lords, until it became obvious that Yan’s turn would be next.

The presence and enormous size of the Terracotta Army in Qin Shi Huangdi’s tomb represent the important role of Qin’s army in the Warring States Period. Without the army, Qin Shi Huangdi would not have unified the other states. For him, his army was his existence; he knew the incredible strength he had with his army which accounts for its presence in his tomb. While some believe that each terracotta warrior is an individual portrait of a person in his army, it cannot be ignored that the influence and the accomplishments of his army as a whole is its vital focus. The outcome from the Warring States Period determined the destiny of all territories. Qin’s army provided Qin Shi Huangdi his destiny as a supreme ruler. The strength of the army continued to grow as Qin territory expanded. As the First Emperor, he must have felt the need for a large army in life as well as in death, perhaps to continue his reign and tradition of expanding his territory in the afterlife.

The Development of China was built in a Military Environment

Funerary art is unique in that it displays one’s cultural beliefs and what was considered most important to that person. Looking at representations of the deceased in works of funerary

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9 Ibid.
art also shows how people used the mortuary sphere to shape and record their identities.\textsuperscript{10} As discussed earlier, Qin Shi Huangdi’s army became imperative to him as he expanded his territory further. The Terracotta Army found in the First Emperor’s tomb confirms the army’s importance to him with which he is identified. With his army’s accomplishments that provided him with a throne over all states, the question as to why he would bury statues representing his army becomes a little clearer--he would have nothing without them. His Terracotta Army has come to embody not just Qin’s endeavors in expanding territory, but also how Qin Shi Huangdi inherited a throne secured only through violence. Military conquest was his birthright as this tradition was handed down from his forefathers. Military influence was the environment in which Qin Shi Huangdi grew up and continued to be in as he unified the states and set up his empire.

By 260 B.C., only seven states remained independent after the fall of the Zhou dynasty as seen below in Figure 2. These states were the Zhao, Yan, Qi, Wei, Han, Chu and Qin. They were controlling and ruthless as they looked to find ways to conquer one another. They would visit one another’s court, to pay their respects and the next year they would seize each other’s cities. Qin was, without a doubt, ruled by fearless leaders and with each generation, these leaders became more prominent and ruthless as they sought control over more land. Brutal personalities were inherited and enhanced; combine this trait with a well-trained heavily armed military, and the state of Qin was sure to develop. At this point, military action became more fierce and regular, a strategy that Qin Shi Huangdi inherited and used to unify China.

During the Warring States Period, rulers changed their titles from Duke to King, as each state became stronger and more independent; and, as seen in the map above, the Qin military had become a major contender. Finally, in 260 B.C., Qin was ruled by King Zhaoxiang. Even though many leaders before him contributed to the success of the Qin State, it was King Zhaoxiang’s (Qin Shi Huangdi’s great grandfather) military success that paved the way for Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi to unify China.

The following military events of the Qin State are taken from Sima Qian’s historical records and exemplify how the Terracotta Army reflects the battlefront atmosphere in which all Qin rulers lived. It was in King Zhaoxiang’s eleventh year of rule when five states, Qi, Hann, Wei, Zhao, and Song, joined in on an attack on Qin.\footnote{Sima Qian. \textit{Records of The Grand Historian}, 29.} Three years after this attack, King Zhaoxiang responded in such a way that displays the military violence handed down to Qin Shi Huangdi. Under the command of General Bai Qi, Qin attacked the Hann and Wei forces capturing five of their cities. This victory seemed to more than make up for the invasion Qin
suffered, but King Zhaoxiang did not stop there as he ordered his general, General Bai Qi, to cut off 240,000 enemy heads. These kinds of actions created the fierce reputation of Qin’s army and its ruler. All feared the repercussions of Qin and its army if any tried to attack.

Military advances made by Qin during King Zhaoxiang’s reign were strategic and vicious. This approach was handed down from father to son and was instrumental in expanding their lands. Again, this is how the presence of the Terracotta Army in Qin Shi Huangdi’s tomb symbolized his birthright as the traditions of military conquests filled the air, and history, with the sense of battle. When Qin Shi Huangdi came to the throne, he had been taught masterfully how violence was the road to secure what he wanted and determined how he would rule.

After the death of King Zhaoxiang, his son, King Xiaowen, succeeded to the throne for a short time. When he died, he was succeeded by his son, King Zhuangxiang, who died only after ruling for four years. At the end of King Zhuangxiang’s reign, his son, King Zheng, ascended to the throne at age 13. King Zheng furthered his great grandfather’s work better than any of his predecessors. He used the aggression to which he was accustomed to conquer the remaining states and bring all territories under Qin control. He became known as Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi.

Although a lot of the heavy lifting was done by his great grandfather, Qin Shi Huangdi still had to finish what his great grandfather had started and secure his own legacy. Qin Shi Huangdi faced fierce opponents from without and within his state. The Terracotta Army symbolizes the connection to culture and the environment in which they were made. As Qin Shi Huangdi continued to fulfill his birthright, the terracotta warriors signify the conquests that were made in order to achieve his destiny. Qin Shi Huangdi continued in the violent culture of Qin

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13 Ibid. 33-35.
which was distinctive from the other states. As mentioned above, each state prospered from
different resources and developed a myriad of customs that developed its own culture. Qin’s
geographic location isolated it and as a result it did not share customs and practices with other
states; but instead, it gained some of its traditions from its tribal neighbors who bordered the
west of Qin, hence the reason Qin’s populace was called barbarians as these tribes were
considered far inferior compared to the dynasty.14

Qin was considered “barbarous” for other reasons beyond their inherited traditions from
tribes. In the military discourse, Evaluating the Enemy, Master Wu talks about the strengths and
weaknesses of each state. Of Qin, he says, “Qin’s nature is strong. Its terrain is difficult. Its
government is severe. Its rewards and punishments are reliable. Its people do not yield; they are
all belligerent…”15

From Master Wu’s research on the Qin state, the difficulty of Qin’s terrain fosters the
unyielding character of its people, which in turn induces severe government, manifested in
extreme rewards and punishments.16 Documents of the Qin dynasty recorded the following type
of rewards and punishments. Citizens of Qin were to be divided in groups of fives and tens to
supervise one another and be mutually liable for one another. If anyone failed to report criminal
activity he or she would be chopped in two at the waist, while those who reported it would
receive a glorified reward that amounted to obtaining the head of an enemy.17 The reward for
reporting a crime exemplifies the setting that surrounded Qin state – it would be as if they had
confiscated an enemy’s head! This was not only acceptable, but it was a mark of honor and

14 The Cambridge History of China. Ed. By Denis Twitchett and John K. Fairbank. (15 vols.; Cambridge,
15 Mark Edward Lewis, The Early Chinese Empires: Qin and Han, 12.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid. 30-31.
dignity. Punishment of a crime, while literal, unlike the reward just mentioned, is equally
gruesome as it condemned the party with the severance of his or her body.

Qin’s strict government regulations of rewards and punishments remained unbroken
through the generations of the Warring States Period in order to have control over their people
whose personality was aggressive as a result. Not only did Qin Shi Huangdi’s birthright include
a massive army that could expand Qin’s territory, but it also included the cultural environment
that surrounded Qin long before Qin Shi Huangdi came to power and is the direct influence the
Terracotta Army symbolizes.

**The Terracotta Army Symbolizes the First Emperor’s Sovereignty and Persona**

When Qin Shi Huangdi succeeded in overthrowing Zhao, Wei, Han, Chu, Qi and Yan in
221 B.C., he used the same aggressive government structure, as discussed above, from the state
of Qin to rule the other states. Each state’s individualized culture and government was
decimated as Qin Shi Huangdi’s policies were put in place. This was sure to upset and
complicate the lives of those who lived outside of Qin who did not live by Qin’s totalitarian
system. The reign of the Qin Dynasty, although short, as it did not survive beyond his son, had a
profound impact on his subjects.

Qin Shi Huangdi came to name his newly founded empire, China. The system of
government he implemented to all his citizens was a Legalist government that was based on
former reformations that took place in the Qin state. Based on these all-encompassing
reformations, the Terracotta Army resembles the emperor’s army, along with the strength and
power his army had over China’s inhabitants. Qin Shi Huangdi’s reign was founded on these
policies that significantly incorporated military service. Legalist philosophy and
standardizations were enforced through Qin Shi Huangdi’s military after he established these regulations during his sovereignty.

In addition to the Terracotta Army embodying the First Emperor’s reign, the Terracotta Army is also symbolic of his personality as his reign reflected the kind of person he was. His natural character was reflected in the laws he established. As military strength continued to be the core of his strength, one can see how the Terracotta Army represented the emperor himself through the dictates he issued of reestablishing the five elements to represent his empire, and through confiscating weapons from his citizens. These points of interest will show how Qin Shi Huangdi’s disposition upheld laws before humanity, characteristic of an army’s role of keeping order in society, symbolized by the Terracotta Army.

**Central to Qin Shi Huangdi’s Reign Was His Military, Represented by His Terracotta Army**

After Qin Shi Huangdi unified the warring states under his rule, he changed his title from king to emperor as he felt it rightly reflected him. This new imperial title was based on the success of the emperor’s army, for it was through his army Qin Shi Huangdi was granted singular authority over China. The Terracotta Army reflects the dominant role the First Emperor’s military played during his reign. The military had to be infused into Qin Shi Huangdi’s policies in order for them to be carried out and for Qin Shi Huangdi’s authority to be acknowledged.

Many citizens who were not accustomed to Qin’s domineering government had to realign their lives to fit the standards and protocols of Qin Shi Huangdi’s established government across China. Regulations and laws foreign to them included abolition of aristocracy with authority under one ruler, taxation by acreage, the setting up of provinces, standardization of writing and
measurements and the reestablishment of elements to represent a dynasty. Through all these
changes, authority under one ruler is the basic foundation that is represented through the
Terracotta Army as the army exemplifies the strength and power it takes to bring an entire
country under one command. It can also be seen through these policies how Qin’s military is
incorporated into them.

The Terracotta Army Represents the Military Organization that helped to Establish
Legalist Philosophy

It is unknown whether Qin Shi Huangdi’s real army was literally represented by the
Terracotta Army or not, but the clay warriors do represent his army as a whole, and as such, also
represent the duties and actions of his actual army. The First Emperor’s warriors had a talented
gift of fighting, but their talent in conquering enemies did not stop at the battlefield. Qin Shi
Huangdi implemented his prized army into everyday life as his army helped establish his policies
to create a totalitarian empire. This integration of military into civilian life spiraled from an
earlier philosophy of Legalism that held strict adherence to law under one ruler. The Terracotta
Army, in its organized battle formation and ladder of authority, symbolizes how Qin Shi
Huangdi was able to get his army to enforce his rules and regulations onto the populace, thus
putting himself on top of the chain of command.

In order to recognize how the Terracotta Army represents Qin Shi Huangdi’s actual army
and their role in helping the emperor become a supreme ruler, the birth of Legalism in Qin state
must be discussed. It was during the Warring States Period that Legalist philosophy was
incorporated into Qin’s government by Shang Yang, a Qin chancellor, in 361 B.C. This
ultimately led Qin Shi Huangdi to become emperor and determined how he continued to rule his
empire. Yang’s reformations set the tone for Qin Shi Huangdi who expanded them further to create singular loyalty to him. Strict unification under one authority was not a new concept. It had been practiced years before in the Qin state. When Qin realized their potential to become a major contender against the other states, Shang Yang coordinated phases to change the government’s system to better organize and rule their subjects in a totalitarian system, similar to how an army is organized.

Such regulations incorporated into Qin’s government were: total abolitions of the aristocracy, the introduction of a system of merit appointments, dismantlement of the well-field system, taxation by acreage on transferable landownership, military service by conscription, and promotion of food production and the textile industry at the expense of all other pursuits. These changes were alien to other regions but succeeded as the military, resembled by the terracotta warriors, were used to enforce the regulations in new territories along with obtaining additional resources that compounded Qin’s wealth.

Sima Qian noted that Shang’s state reforms were based on the military as the entire populace was rated on a twenty-rank military hierarchy. As a result, the new policies greatly affected the military as they were based on service in the military. Expansion of territory required an increase of soldiers to not only fight for Qin, but also to keep Qin stabilized from within by enforcing its laws. This, again, would account for the numerous clay warriors excavated in Qin Shi Huangdi’s tomb as they represent the vast number of soldiers the emperor had across all of China.

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19 Ray Huang, China: A Macro History, 28.
20 Mark Edward Lewis, The Early Chinese Empires: Qin and Han, 31.
Besides Qin’s citizens living by a military pyramid, Qin’s soldiers were willing to impose Qin Shi Huangdi’s regulations because of the benefits they receive from following orders. Anyone who gained merit in battle by slaying enemies or commanding victorious units was rewarded with promotion of a higher rank which stipulated the amounts of land, numbers of dwellings, and quotas of slaves one could receive. After the unification of China, enemies were considered anyone not observing laws set by Qin Shi Huangdi. The emperor’s soldiers would continue to gain merit for making sure Qin Shi Huangdi’s policies were followed. This in turn created a social order based on military service that determined how one could live.

Centralizing military around the policies of the government allowed for merit to be the source of one’s comfort and life success, not familial lineage as was the case for the aristocracy before it was dissolved.

The symbolic importance of the Terracotta Army cannot be overstated as the background of Qin’s regulations was used by Qin Shi Huangdi. As the army was the foundation of Qin’s society it was thus the foundation of everyday life. The Terracotta Army signifies the power and rigid order of organization and enforced rules the state, and later on the empire, was built on. In order for an army to be powerful it must follow orders. The formation of the Terracotta Army in Figure 3 below illustrates this idea as the army is in battle formation, awaiting orders that represent the establishment of rigid Legalist control they lived by.

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Qin Shi Huangdi enhanced Legalist policies that developed in Qin’s government a hundred years before he became emperor. Merit based on military service ensured a fierce military as peasants could heighten their status depending on the success of their battles; fighting became their entire life. In Figure 3 above, the lowest ranking soldiers were the robed soldiers. Robed soldiers were situated on the front lines, and the first to come in contact with battle.\textsuperscript{22} It is this position that peasants of Qin would start their career in the military. Like any military, the ladder of authority is illustrated with robed warriors in the lowest rank who answered to their

superiors of officers and generals, who in turn answered to their superior, Qin Shi Huangdi. This same system of authority was implemented into the government and enforced by Qin’s military.

Qin Shi Huangdi was not going to change a pecking order system that was so effective in obtaining resources and land. In order to keep those resources and its territory, he used the same Legalist philosophy that proved fruitful during the Warring State Period with an army that was well trained in the Legalist ways. He kept and enhanced the policies from the Warring States Period for his reign, not just because they were Qin’s ways, but because they worked.

**The Emperor’s Standardizations of Provinces, Books, and Authority Set up His Complete Supremacy through the Force of Military Who are symbolized by the Terracotta Army**

Qin Shi Huangdi used his military to develop Legalist philosophy further to unify not only the other states by laws, but also through homogenizing each region’s culture. Enforcing laws is only one way of unifying inhabitants from multiple areas. Qin Shi Huangdi recognized the multiple aspects of a culture were more than just laws. Over the course of his reign, he placed orders to standardize his empire through books, script, measurements, weapons, and even elements so that Legalism would not be interrupted by things that were insignificant compared to law and order.

These standardizations gave Qin Shi Huangdi additional authority as ruler over his empire. His dictates were fully expected to be followed and carried out by his militia. The roles and responsibilities of Qin Shi Huangdi’s army are symbolized by the Terracotta Army as the soldier’s actions gave the emperor absolute power over his people. Only one can give directives that will trickle down the chain of command to be fulfilled. If this is interrupted with other orders, chaos will ensue disturbing the leader’s instructions, as well as, defying the philosophy of order that is the core of its society.
The setting up of provinces was one such decree that exemplified Qin Shi Huangdi’s goal of retaining complete reign over his empire, and at the same time, maintaining military influence central to his reign. Re-instating states, divided among Qin Shi Huangdi’s sons, was suggested by his chancellors since much of his territory was far from the capital and would be extremely hard to control. But the Emperor thought better of this realizing that dividing China into states again would risk history of the Warring States Period to repeat itself. Instead, Qin Shi Huangdi implemented provinces throughout all of China. In total there were 36 provinces and each of them had a governor, a military commander, and a superintendent all who worked under the Emperor.23

Military commanders were Generals, who would safeguard the emperor’s laws to be followed to the letter in every province. This solution guaranteed complete fidelity to the Emperor. Figure 4 to the left, is of a clay sculpture of a General from the Terracotta Army who exemplifies the role military commanders had of executing Qin Shi Huangdi’s regulations.

Another example of Qin Shi Huangdi’s need for his army to have complete supremacy happened in his 34th year of rule when scholars and academicians criticized the emperor’s decision to create provinces. Qin Shi Huangdi took this concern to his ministers, where Chancellor Li Si offered the following advice:

Now the August Emperor has unified all under heaven, distinguishing black from white and establishing a single source of authority. Yet these adherents of private theories band together to criticize the laws and directives. Hearing that an order

23 Sima Qian. Records of The Grand Historian, 44.
has been handed down, each one proceeds to discuss it in the light of his theories. At court they disapprove in their hearts; outside they debate it in the streets. They hold it a mark of fame to defy the ruler, regard it as lofty to take a dissenting stance, and they lead the lesser officials in fabricating slander. If behavior such as this is not prohibited, then in upper circles the authority of the ruler will be compromised, and in lower ones cliques will form. Therefore it should be prohibited.24

The First Emperor agreed with his chancellor and prohibited any discussions or arguments about any orders or rules given by the Emperor. What was announced by him was finalized and no one could or would be allowed to argue about it, for if they did there were negative, permanent consequences. Furthermore, the First Emperor saw to it to keep his people in ignorance and under his thumb by ordering an imperial decree that all historical documents not pertaining to Qin would be burned along with all books on philosophy and classical history. Specific books that were considered a detriment and a challenge to the Qin dynasty and its authoritative ruler were copies of the Odes and Documents, as well as the papers of the Hundred Schools of Philosophy. These books talked of philosophical theories, posterity and mandate of other dynasties. Anyone caught with them or even discussing them, who wasn’t a scholar, was executed by the hand of the emperor’s army. This again emphasizes how the Terracotta Army symbolizes Qin Shi Huangdi’s actual army of following orders that come only from him.

At first, it seemed that scholars were exempted from the emperor’s rampage and his soldiers reach, but it turned out none were exempt. After alchemists Master Hou and Master Lu, returned from their search for rare herbs and immortals on behalf of Qin Shi Huangdi, they slandered the emperor saying, “Although seventy men have been appointed as academicians…and 300 men who practice the art of divining…they are so terrified of giving

offence that they merely flatter the ruler and do not dare speak out and tell him his faults.”

These and others’ words spoken reached the ears of Qin Shi Huangdi. He became livid at the fact that those who worked for him would degrade him. He would tolerate no criticism.

Qin Shi Huangdi investigated all scholars to see who was loyal to him and who was not. This investigation turned quickly for the worst and ended up being a huge execution party provided by the First Emperor’s devoted military, embodied by the Terracotta Army. According to Sima Qian’s record, Qian says, “The scholars reported on one another in an attempt to exonerate themselves.” Distrust quickly spread which prevented any truth from being established. In the end “over 460 persons were convicted of violating the prohibitions, and were executed at Xianyang…” Executions on this scale without retaliation shows the power and authority Qin Shi Huangdi had over his empire, and at the same time the complete dedication of his military to carry out these horrific orders.

The need for an army didn’t stop after the war was finished because military power had to be enforced in every aspect of life. Military influence continued to be used and was relied upon heavily to enforce laws, punishments and to ensure the success of Qin Shi Huangdi’s reign. The power of the emperor’s military helped to uphold his law without fail. Qin Shi Huangdi was the mouthpiece, but his warriors were the power behind those words. This is how the Terracotta Army symbolized his reign and military.

**Additional Standardizations of Weights, Measurements and Language Enforced by Qin Shi Huangdi and His Military Instituted the Loss of Many Cultures**

Besides a severe reduction of scholars and books, Qin Shi Huangdi also reformed economics, language and trade to complete the unification of his conquered lands into one

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26 Ibid.
nation. He made this possible by changing weights and measurements to a standardized system, making uniform the gauge of wheeled vehicle, and standardizing the writing system and coinage. These specific changes were not the only changes, but they may have had the biggest effect on the majority of China’s residents because many of them lived in different regions with their own system of writing, language and measurements. One set of standards seemed wise for Qin Shi Huangdi. Communication no longer hindered his authority as he was able to maintain complete control across his unified nation.

At times, standardizing may seem to be an improvement for society, but the effect of standardizing in this case resulted in the exclusion of all differences. Therefore, the Terracotta Army also comes to symbolize a despotic regime, the loss of many languages, cultures, systems of numbers and much of the rich diversity that the Chinese continent had to offer. The Terracotta Army symbolizes terrorism, an ethnic cleansing and the loss of many cultures. The symbolism is tragic.

The administrative uniformity imposed by Qin masked the fact that it remained one state ruling others, with a clear division between Qin and its recently conquered rivals. Changes made by Qin Shi Huangdi may have been seen to unify a nation and develop a stronger empire, but with Qin Shi Huangdi outlawing criticisms of him, burning books and scholars who defied his authority, and eliminating all traditions except Qin’s, leaves no doubt that the laws the First Emperor instituted were to protect him and his reign that segregated him from his subjects. Through Legalist philosophy, Qin Shi Huangdi had complete control over his military. Behind them came his strength and power over his people through the chain of command as exemplified


through the Terracotta Army. However mighty he believed himself to be, the end result to his reign, family, and dynasty was a complete loss.

**Characteristics of the Military Illustrated by the Terracotta Army Correlates to the First Emperor’s Persona**

The Terracotta Army discussed so far in this section represents Qin Shi Huangdi’s real army’s organization, power of authority and the loss of many cultures. But the Terracotta Army has come to symbolize much more than power and tradition. They are also symbolic of Qin Shi Huangdi’s personality. His laws and policies discussed earlier are insights to what kind of man the First Emperor was and what he wanted for his empire. Continued dictates, such as the reestablishment of an element to represent Qin dynasty and relieving weapons from all persons except his military, continue to exemplify his brutal personality. Brutality comes from aggressive individuals who crave control. They will fight for what they want and will rarely contemplate the consequences. One of the consequences we see in this instance is the devastating loss of culture through standardization. Qin Shi Huangdi used his warriors to evolve and apply his philosophy with full force. Such brutality can be seen all throughout history from others who have tried to force their regulations onto people with ruthlessness, but none succeeded like Qin Shi Huangdi. His personality is one of a relentless fighter, mirrored by the clay warriors present in his tomb.

**The Five Elements that created the Terracotta Army is the Same Five Elements That Determined the Destiny of a Dynasty and its Ruler**

Before the Warring States Period began, dynasties used one of five elements to characterize their dynasty. Qin Shi Huangdi reestablished this ancient tradition when, once again, a legitimate dynasty ruled after the Warring States Period. He believed that these five elements, or
powers, succeeded each other in an unending cycle each overcoming its predecessor and controlling the course of history. These five elements were: fire, water, wood, metal and earth. The unending process in which these elements overcome one another gives an intriguing insight to creation and immortality as there is no end, only a continual progress and advancement.

Each of these elements is present in the medium of the Terracotta Army. Soil from the earth mixed with water formed the clay needed to sculpt the warriors. Fire in kilns was used to harden the clay into their warrior forms, while wood and metal created the weapons each warrior held. Although only one element was chosen to represent a dynasty, the use of each of these elements in the Terracotta Army symbolized the eternal powers Qin Shi Huangdi wanted to rule with, even in the afterlife. The complete use of them encompassed the totality of power and control he desired over the universe.

While the five elements are present in the medium of the Terracotta Army, the hardness of the sculptured warriors, combined with the cold, damp tomb in which they stand is characteristic of Qin Shi Huangdi. Sima Qian recorded this in his records pertaining to Qin’s Emperor, “Only by being stern and severe, by settling all affairs in the light of the law, by cutting and slashing without mercy or gentleness, he believed, could he comply with the destiny decreed by the five powers. Hence he assiduously applied the law and refused to pardon even crimes committed far in the past.” The laws of nature cannot be altered or ignored. The five elements determine the destiny of the dynasty, and Qin Shi Huangdi used the logic of nature from the elements and applied it to his way of rule by putting law before humanity. These ensured his laws would not be altered or ignored. His nature and decision to rule in this capacity points back to how the environment of a person will influence the actions of that person. Qin Shi Huangdi’s

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military and government bred into him the brutal side of humanity. Like the Terracotta Army, cold, hard and armed, ready for battle, the First emperor made his decisions with a combat attitude that correlated to his environment.

All elements were used in the Terracotta Army, but only one element could be used to characterize the emperor’s dynasty. Qin Shi Huangdi chose an element that overcame fire represented by the earlier Zhou dynasty--water. With the establishment of the element of water to symbolize Qin Shi Huangdi’s dynasty, influences associated with water further personified his personality as each element was associated with colors, numbers, seasons and life.

Again, in Sima Qian’s book, *Records of the Grand Historian*, he talks of a few changes the First Emperor decreed to become the standard. It reads,

> He changed the time of the court celebrations marking the beginning of the year, holding them all on the first day of the tenth month, and all clothing, flags, and pennants honoured the colour black. Among numbers, six was the standard, so that tallies and official caps were six inches, carriages were six feet, six feet were taken to make up one pace, and carriages were drawn by six horses. He also changed the name of the Yellow River, calling it “Powerful Water” to indicate that the era of the power of water had begun.  

The element of water was also associated with winter, darkness, harshness and death. These characteristics can be seen in Qin Shi Huangdi’s personality, just as they are associated with the terracotta warriors who stand six feet tall, unemotional in a cold, dark tomb. The laws he made were based on the water element and were interwoven into all aspects of society to create the everlasting empire Qin Shi Huangdi wanted. Law became harsh as it was the only standard that mattered. This strict standard caused death for those who did not respect the law. Just like the force from a tsunami or a flood, so was the force and devastation of Qin Shi Huangdi’s army. Fear and dominance ruled. It was his word that ordered and his soldiers who


32 Ibid.
enforced his laws and edicts. This is how Qin Shi Huangdi ruled his empire. Orders were given and they were to be obeyed. His aggressive behavior turned brutal, and is resembled in his Terracotta Army.

The Terracotta Army Symbolizes Qin Shi Huangdi’s Controlling Personality through His Confiscation of Weapons by His Army

When the Terracotta Army was created, the warrior’s hands were shaped to carry real weapons. These bronze weapons consisted of swords, lances, crossbows, spears, halberds and hooks that were designed with the same quality as a real weapon from this era. These weapons were important to the individual soldiers and to the First Emperor, for they were used to conquer and defend themselves, and their leader. Weapons, as seen with the Terracotta Army, also became the means of suppression that can be seen by Qin Shi Huangdi’s hand that exemplified his domnative personality.

Soldiers were used to keep Legalist control in China’s provinces. Laws continued to be passed that gave Qin Shi Huangdi undisputed sovereign over his nation. One specific law he passed exhibited once again the type of ruler the First Emperor was. This law ordered the confiscation of weapons from his subjects. No weapons would mean less resistance. This would appear to have the face of peace, but, in reality, its true self is of dominion and suppression. Domination over a weaponless nation throughout all of history never created peace, but, in fact, birthed further violence and death. Qin Shi Huangdi’s Terracotta Army and their weapons represent the ability to dominate and suppress.

Confiscating weapons is a good thing if it means seizing them from those who would intend to use them to harm others. This would help to protect life and help lower violence. But

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what if weapons confiscated, were confiscated by those in authority who intended to use this to further their agenda? Qin Shi Huangdi used this tactic so his career would be unparalleled to any past or future leaders. He believed he was exalted above kings when he changed his name to “August Emperor”. His victory over the other states elevated his status. He was the rightful sovereign to rule over China. But his elevated status was still mortal. Revolts and assassination attempts may have been the reason for him to revoke weapons. Or maybe it was the defiance against him that made him nervous; perhaps a combination of both. Whichever, these actions against him would have altered what he was trying to accomplish as an emperor.

To be the epitome of all leaders requires a remarkable amount of respect and influence to be ingrained on a people so none would forget. Qin Shi Huangdi did this through his laws and standardizations. His empire would be in accord to his success and principles represented by his clay warriors today. Qin Shi Huangdi’s achievements would not be possible if there were threats of any kind towards him. The emperor used his troops, who covered all of China, to make sure there were no threats to be made. His word was law and he was going to make sure it was followed and respected. He needed full domination if he was going to retain his title as emperor. This mindset created more violence by the emperor as any indifference towards him was immediately attacked and killed. The Terracotta Army signifies this violence in Qin Shi Huangdi. It was upon his orders that his soldiers tracked down violators and eliminated them with their weapons, the same weapons created for the Terracotta Army.

Anybody can order a decree, but unless he or she has some kind of force to make sure that decree is carried out, it can be ignored. As well as ordering the confiscation of weapons, Qin Shi Huangdi set up troops in every province so that none would ignore his will.\textsuperscript{34} Anyone, not a soldier, did not need weapons for they were “protected” by the emperor through his army.

\textsuperscript{34} Sima Qian. \textit{Records of The Grand Historian}, 45.
Weapons were only allowed to be in the hands of his actual army. As mentioned before, Qin Shi Huangdi’s clay warriors had tangible weapons specifically made for them. Figures 4-6 below, display the genuine weapons carried by the terracotta warriors.

Figure 4. A Bronze Lance From the Terracotta Army. UCL Institute of Archeology.

Figure 5. A Bronze Halberd from the Terracotta Army. UCL Institute of Archeology.
Civilian suits were disputed in Legalist courts and, as explained before, had deadly outcomes. The injustices to civilians by the emperor, however, went unchallenged and were even more deadly as they had no way to defend themselves. The burning of classical and cultural books along with the execution of hundreds of scholars was not just but was allowed to happen because the emperor’s troops had a leash on China’s populace. The lack of weapons, along with harsh punishments, deterred one from objecting to the emperor’s actions. Not allowing weapons, even for self-defense, is evidence that Qin Shi Huangdi was worried that there was still a chance of major betrayals and rebellion as seen in the Warring States Period. This was not a chance he wanted to take. Threats were his enemy and he was going to make sure there were none to make.

By confiscating weapons from his subjects, Qin Shi Huangdi could declare himself the true August Emperor, as he had complete control over his empire. Qin Shi Huangdi’s soldiers
enforced his laws, so it would only be logical that they be the ones to confiscate the weapons under the military command in each district. This left only the military, as seen with the Terracotta Army, with weapons to keep China unified, undisturbed and quiet from complaints, betrayals and revolts.

Qin Shi Huangdi most likely did not fight along-side his soldiers or command them from the battle field, but the emperor fought ferociously to establish his empire through political tactics. The Terracotta Army is Qin Shi Huangdi’s persona exemplified by the way he took control of the Qin state to be the ultimate victor of all the warring states, and then later when he held reign over China. Military power had to be applied in every facet of life and was depended upon to enforce laws, punishments and to ensure the success of his reign. The power of his military helped to uphold his destructive laws without fail; it was vital to his success. Again, Qin Shi Huangdi was the mouthpiece, but his warriors were the power behind those words. His warriors embodied who he was and how he ruled, just as they still denote his character and commanding reign through the Terracotta Army.

**Terracotta Army Symbolizes Qin Shi Huangdi’s Beliefs**

Understanding art is similar to understanding people; the process is never finished but continually deepens.\textsuperscript{35} Understanding how China came to be and the ruler that unified it allows us to understand why he would have the Terracotta Army created. The army played a vital role for China as they were the protectors of law and became the environment in which China was built and ruled. Our understanding of Qin Shi Huangdi is still not finished as there is yet another side of him that is symbolized through the Terracotta Army. Funerary art found in tombs, such as the First Emperor’s, gives visual expression to beliefs. The Terracotta Army has continued to deepen our understanding of Qin Shi Huangdi because the army reveals his death anxiety, along

with his belief of an afterlife. Qin Shi Huangdi had the means to supply himself with a tomb that alleviated some of his fears of dying through material objects called spirit vessels that merged the real world into the spirit world.

The Terracotta Army Signifies Qin Shi Huangdi’s Death Anxiety

For many people, death is not a topic to dwell on. This was the same for the First Emperor; in fact he despised any talk about death, it seemed that even with his tough military personality the concept of death scared him. This could be due to several prominent experiences he had that caused extreme agitation towards death. First, Qin Shi Huangdi experienced the death of his father at a tender age of 13. Secondly, he encountered several assassination attempts at various times in his life. These frightening experiences inflicted pain and paranoia about death.

When Qin Shi Huangdi first assumed the throne he ordered his tomb to be built. His plans included objects and replicas of what he had in real life. Items found in his tomb not only exemplified his beliefs, but they were also created to relieve some of his fear about death as these items were to continue to help and serve him in the afterlife, such as his Terracotta Army. On top of building a tomb to comfort him in the hereafter, his death anxiety in adulthood became so great that he dispatched envoys to seek out immortality. His Terracotta Army signifies his efforts in obtaining immortality; either through this life or in the afterlife because of his extreme fear of dying.

Personal experience influences our attitudes, beliefs, and feelings. Qin Shi Huangdi’s personal experience with the death of his father and failed assassination attempts on his life made

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him very aware of the frailties of life that developed his anxieties. For him, immortals and immortality was not a myth or fable. Perhaps because he wanted it so badly, he believed in the existence of eternal beings, and in their ability to provide immortality to him. In 219 B.C. the emperor was approached by his magicians with the claim of the existence of immortals living on three mountains called Penglai, Fangzhang, and Yingzhou. They had a general idea of the location but needed the means to journey there for their emperor. With Qin Shi Huangdi’s fear of death, he consented to this proposal and accommodated them with what they requested for the journey--a boat, equipment, and several thousand boys and girls to help in the search for the immortal men.38

These men were well stocked with supplies and help, but they failed to find the immortals along with their elixir and rare herbs for the emperor. Even though this trip was costly, the emperor sent out others on different voyages to look for these eternal beings. No matter how many men, or children, he sent to find his eternal desire, they returned empty handed. Years passed, and loyalty to the emperor waned. Some of Qin Shi Huangdi’s magicians criticized and abandoned him, while others continued to scheme and lie to him in order to save themselves from his wrath when they could not find what he was looking for. With desperation, the emperor’s magicians told him, “The herbs of Penglai can surely be obtained. But always there are large fish that cause difficulty, and therefore unable to reach the island. We would like to request that a skilled archer be assigned to accompany us so that if we sight any fish, he can shoot at them with a repeating crossbow.”39

Qin Shi Huangdi took these desperate men at their word and agreed to another attempt at finding immortality. This time the emperor ordered, “Those who set out to sea should carry

38 Sima Qian. Records of The Grand Historian, 49.
39 Ibid. 61.
along equipment for seizing a gigantic fish."⁴⁰ With this, his magicians prepared for their
to Penglai Mountain once again, but this time the First Emperor decided to go along with
them. He and others carried crossbows looking out for the fish that deterred former voyages.
They eventually came across some huge fish. The emperor actually killed one, but success to
reach Penglai Mountain still eluded them when Qin Shi Huangdi fell gravely ill.

His last act as emperor was to attempt to find immortality, but his life on earth expired
before he could find it. Although talk of death was forbidden, Qin Shi Huangdi knew his time
was running out and wrote to his eldest son, Prince Fusu, saying, “When mourning is announced,
proceed to Xianyang and carry out the burial.”⁴¹ Qin Shi Huangdi died at Ping Terrace in Shaqiu
and was then transferred to his monumental tomb at Mt. Li where he was interred with his
treasures.

Qin Shi Huangdi was obsessed with immortality. He wanted to escape death so badly
that he risked thousands of lives and many resources to achieve it. As anxiety is a condition that
seeks its own relief, Qin Shi Huangdi sought to relieve his worry through gaining immortality.⁴²
But Qin Shi Huangdi believed that his spirit continued in an afterlife and would be the same as
he lived in life. So why would he spend major resources to find immortality in this life if he
knew his spirit would live on?

Finding the rare herbs or the elixir of life was a long shot for Qin Shi Huangdi. He
might have held out hope for it, but he might have known that the possibility of obtaining such a
thing was next to impossible. With this in mind, the emperor continued to spend yet more
resources to build an extravagant tomb. While Qin Shi Huangdi’s tomb and his Terracotta Army


⁴¹ Ibid.

could be evidence instead for the First Emperor conquering death and providing himself with assurance of overcoming death, it can’t be ignored that tombs are the visual expression to beliefs, these beliefs have the basic function of reducing an individual’s intense fear of death.43 The First Emperor alleviated his fear by including everything he had in his mortal life to accompany him in the afterlife. Qin Shi Huangdi’s replicated clay army was placed west of his main tomb to continue to defend him in the afterlife.44 If the emperor did die, he made sure to furnish himself with the luxuries and protection he had in life to still yet provide himself with a sense of immortality in the hereafter. Even though the Terracotta Army was built to ease Qin Shi Huangdi’s fear of death, they still symbolize his unease as he felt the need for his warriors. His concern about dying was definitely seen through his determination to obtain immortality, but his concerns also spilled over into his tomb as the terracotta warriors would provide protection in the afterlife symbolizing his death anxiety.

**The Terracotta Warriors Are Spirit Vessels**

How could the Terracotta Army defend the emperor in the afterlife? Its purpose was to fulfill the conviction Qin Shi Huangdi had about the hereafter and his use for them. For those who believed in the afterlife, it was much like the world of the living.45 The spirit world known as the afterlife was believed to be patterned after this physical world. Images and objects of this realm were buried with the deceased for their soul to use while entombed; these are called spirit vessels. The terracotta warriors are spirit vessels that reflect the First Emperor’s view of the spirit world that determined how his tomb looked and the purpose of spirit vessels.

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45 Ibid. 204.
Before the arrival of Buddhism, ancient Chinese believed in the existence of autonomous soul[s] as the source of human life and intelligence that, by the time the Warring States Period ended, and Qin Shi Huangdi ascended the throne, was believed to contain two souls.\textsuperscript{46} The first soul was called the hun-soul, which departs the body upon death and ascends to heaven while the second soul, called the po-soul, stayed with the remains inside the tomb. This may be why Qin Shi Huangdi tried so hard to find immortality as he did not want his po-soul to remain trapped inside his tomb. Because of the idea that the po-soul could not leave the tomb, the tomb became a replica of the deceased’s house for the po-soul to live just as it did while in this life.\textsuperscript{47} In order for tombs to be replicated into homes, or in the case of Qin Shi Huangdi, his palace, imitations of the same objects and images were placed inside graves as they portrayed what kind of person the deceased was and still would be in the afterlife. Objects stored with the deceased illustrate his or her interests, hobbies, social class and authority.

Master Xun, a philosopher during the Warring States Period, indicated this about tombs and the spirit world, “In the funeral rites one adorns the dead with the trappings of the living. On a grand scale one imitates what he had in life to send him off to the dead. As though dead, but as though still alive; as though gone, but as though still present, the end and the beginning are one.”\textsuperscript{48} The treatment of the dead as if they were alive is extended to objects placed inside their tombs. These items were more than decoration for the po-soul. They became the vessels which the dead used to continue living. These are known as spirit vessels.


\textsuperscript{47} Mark Edward Lewis, The Early Chinese Empires: Qin and Han, 189.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
Spirit vessels served as substitutes or surrogates for some “real” object that was a living, functional, bigger, or more precious entity. Spirit vessels allowed the deceased to use and manipulate the objects and figures as they did when they were alive. It was believed that the life they lived on earth would be the same they would live in the afterlife. Thus, the spirit vessels permitted them to keep their status with the objects and figures acting as proxies for the real living objects or persons. Some examples of spirit vessels found in tombs are utensils, personal clothing, silks, animal figurines, sculpted servants and officials, buildings and tools. Spirit vessels were made only for funerary use as their sole purpose was to comfort the dead and relieve any want they might have while in the afterlife. The Terracotta Army is Qin Shi Huangdi’s spirit vessel for his actual army. His need to have every entity he had in life, even his soldiers, to accompany him in his burial chamber testifies to his paranoia of death and to his belief that his po-soul would actually live on in his tomb.

Figure 7. Terracotta Warriors on the March. Smithsonian.com. 2009.

Qin Shi Huangdi spared no expense, or human life, to build his burial chamber. His efforts to replicate all that he had in life were based on the belief that one’s tomb had the ability

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to keep one’s social status. In fact, Master Xun again stated “multiple coffins, lavish grave goods, elaborate decorations, and funerary garments defended social order by maintaining hierarchy in death ritual.”\textsuperscript{50} It was through spirit vessels located in the tomb that allowed the po-soul to live on in accordance with how they lived while alive. Since the First Emperor’s army was so integrated into China’s society, its presence through the Terracotta Army was one way which helped Qin Shi Huangdi keep his status as emperor.

Qin Shi Huangdi’s tomb plans were drawn up as soon as his father’s funerary rites were consummated. These plans were probably revised and extended as he advanced to manhood, kingship to august emperor, to encompass the universe by which he lived.\textsuperscript{51} Items, other than his army, buried with Qin Shi Huangdi are described in Sima Qian’s records that talk of magnificent funerary art and architecture. He wrote,

Replicas of palaces, scenic towers, and the hundred officials, as well as rare utensils and wonderful objects, were brought to fill up the tomb. Craftsmen were ordered to set up crossbows and arrows, rigged so they would immediately shoot down anyone attempting to break in. Mercury was used to fashion imitations of the hundred rivers, the Yellow River and the Yangtze, and the seas, constructed in such a way that they seemed to flow. Above were representations of all the heavenly bodies, below, the features of the earth.\textsuperscript{52}

Objects of the finest craftsmanship were buried along with the emperor to represent his universe in which he lived. As amazing as Qin Shi Huangdi’s central tomb might be with all the possible spirit vessels, the discovery of his Terracotta Army is more remarkable because there are not only thousands of them, but they are life-sized, unlike his palace. It would be safe to say that his army is just as important to him in the afterlife as it was in his mortal life. His army gave him strength to rule in a new founded empire. He relied heavily upon them in his mortal life.

\textsuperscript{50} Mark Edward Lewis, \textit{The Early Chinese Empires: Qin and Han}, 199.
\textsuperscript{52} Sima Qian. \textit{Records of The Grand Historian}, 63.
This reliance would not be weakened after death as Qin Shi Huangdi would continue to live as an emperor with his po-soul and would still have need of his soldiers.

The Terracotta Army is a Spirit Vessel that Reflect its Role as an Army

The building of Qin Shi Huangdi’s spirit vessel army was indeed very important to him since sacrificing his real soldiers to accompany him in the afterlife was not feasible and could have possibly crippled his newly established empire. Careful considerations took place in preparing and building the clay army as can be seen with the wide variety of 7,000 soldiers, each with individual characteristics. Because of how personalized each warrior is, some believe that the emperor’s Terracotta Army was built based on actual individuals of his army, while others refuse such a claim and believe that the warriors’ faces conform to a certain number of stereotypes and not representations of individuals.\(^{53}\) One particular scholar, Ladislav Kesner, believes that the soldiers did not represent any particular person but the reality on which they were created was based on the importance of the role they played. He asserts, “In the emperor’s eyes, his soldiers were not important for who they were, but for what they could do or what they could be used for. Their individual personalities were fully encased in their roles…”\(^{54}\) Qin Shi Huangdi’s standardizations were not just applied to language, money, measurements and laws, but also to his military whose personalities were in uniform with his ideals.

Typically, artisans from this era idealized the faces of royalty, while faces of lower status individuals, such as soldiers, would be shown realistically. It should not come as a surprise to find each terracotta warrior with individual qualities as they were created in the artistic tradition that implied their social status, succumbing all the warriors once again, to Qin Shi Huangdi’s

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\(^{54}\) Ibid.
standardization. Another reason the Terracotta Army is considered more of a standard than individualized can be seen in the treatment of their bodies. The warrior’s bodies are formal and stiff. The anatomy of their bodies lack details that would normally describe and characterize a person. The terracotta warrior’s uniformity in anatomy and lower class status exemplifies the standard Qin Shi Huangdi’s actual army was expected to live by.\textsuperscript{55}

Even though the soldiers in the Terracotta Army had individual characteristics, these characteristics were not meant to be portraits of actual soldiers, but real physical appearances that added to the realness of the whole army and the duties they were to perform. Their duties as a whole would be considered more important to a Legalist society than their individualism. While there are still disagreements if the clay soldiers literally represent the First Emperor’s army or not, there is no doubt that great care and skill was put into them to become spirit vessels for him as they would act in the hereafter precisely as their proxies did in this world and render the occupant of the tomb the same service.\textsuperscript{56}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{terracotta-warriors.png}
\caption{Terracotta Warriors. PRLOG.}
\end{figure}


\textsuperscript{56} Ladislav Kesner. “Likeness of no one: (Re)presenting the first emperor’s army, 115.
All of Qin Shi Huangdi’s funerary art was based on real world objects and people. In a sense, the spirit vessels of exquisite architecture, sculpture, and rare goods in Qin Shi Huangdi’s tomb represents his stubborn way to still obtain immortality. The realistic and individual qualities of the terracotta warriors mirror what is found in the real world. This attempt at real world recreation alludes to a sense of a mortal life. As Qin Shi Huangdi commands his spirit vessel army in the afterlife, he is given a sense of the mortal world that he was so unwilling to give up. Even through death, Qin Shi Huangdi still had everlasting life as he took these spirit vessels with him into the next life.

Conclusion

Funerary art is symbolic of beliefs and death anxieties one may have. The numerous items written about and found in Qin Shi Huangdi’s tomb display the profound depths of anxiety he had about death. From the very start of his reign, he ordered his tomb to be constructed along with numerous spirit vessels to be created. These things would have been greatly enhanced once he assumed the title of Emperor so he could be more at ease with the concept of death if he didn’t find the source of immortality in this world. His concern about death, as stated before, may have stemmed from experiencing several assassination attempts and the passing of his father at only 13. These events are certain to affect a young man and, with thousands of people at his command, he was certain to try to alleviate his worry in any way he could.

As the military was a vital facet in China’s society and the emperor’s rein, the presence of the Terracotta Army in Qin Shi Huangdi’s tomb is logical. Their existence inside his tomb continues to show the personal side of the First Emperor. Tombs are the final physical resting place for all people and depict their values that reflect their attitudes and beliefs. Qin Shi Huangdi was no different; his tomb reflected his attitudes and beliefs of his status as an emperor.
Each decision Qin Shi Huangdi made was based on his want for eternal reign which could only have been maintained by his military.

Besides the funerary art of the Terracotta Army symbolizing his beliefs, the army also, undoubtedly, symbolized how Qin Shi Huangdi unified and ruled China. The power he held and ordered was considerable. The only way was accomplished through his army. Almost every aspect of Qin Shi Huangdi’s life was centered on his army. It was his soldiers who put into action his words; it was his soldiers who allowed him to be the First emperor and to control China. With their influence, it was only fitting for him to create a clay army to accompany him in the afterlife. The size and magnitude which he had his Terracotta Army built shows how much he needed his warriors and relied on them, and would continue to rely on them, to carry out his orders in the spirit realm.
Bibliography


