Achievements in the Qin Dynasty

Early in the Qin Empire, the practice of Legalism reached its peak in Chinese history. Legalism was a form of government with a focus on greater efficiency and less tradition, in which strict following the letter of the law was made most important. Emperor Shi Huangti approved of Legalism and implemented it across his country.

In this form of government farmers were freed from serfdom (a kind of slavery where they were tied to the land and its owner), and Shi Huangti reduced the power of the aristocracy. The people throughout the empire were now supposed to bear responsibility for each other. If a person did not behave according to the rules then others were required to report him. If they did not do this, they were quartered or beheaded. Fear and control were the key features of this political system. In addition, one's personal importance to the empire was also a key element. If you, as a person, meant nothing to the state, your life was meaningless. Those who contributed the most to the state were highly rewarded while those whose lives were considered not important were sent to work as slaves on Shi Huangti’s building projects such as the Great Wall of China, the Grand Canal, and the roads which increased ease of trade and travel.

Shi Huangti believed that uneducated people were easier to control and the people should remain stupid so that they would never think to doubt who was in charge of the empire. This policy resulted in the burning of books on a large scale and, in 212 BCE, on the advice of his chief advisor Li Siu, Shi Huangti had scholars executed. Books were banned throughout the empire, as was teaching, except for subjects touching upon the re-written history of the Qin Dynasty to glorify Shi Huangti.

Legalism helped to create a superior army, a disciplined bureaucracy (non-elected officials who had specialized duties), an obedient population, and the unquestioned authority of a strong central government. This bureaucratic model became the standard for the Chinese government and is still maintained in some form today.

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Adapted from Ancient History encyclopedia. http://www.ancient.eu.com/Qin_Dynasty/
Culturally, the dynasty left a marvelous ancient artwork: the Terracotta Army in Xi’an. This tomb reflects the character of the Chinese emperor and his unending desire to be immortal. The terracotta army also shows what Chinese society at that time was able to produce once it had been formed as a state. The most famous legacy left by the Qin is The Great Wall of China. Although the present structure does not date from the Qin Dynasty, it was begun under Shi Huangti, as was the Grand Canal, and the roads which today link the cities of China and the countryside.

Terra Cotta Army Xian

Great Wall of China