



# The Characteristic of Theocracy Played in the Qin Political System

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**Abstract.** This paper studies the theocratic elements contained in the Qin Dynasty as a whole based on the sacrificial benefits and the promulgation of decrees of the first emperor of the Qin Dynasty “Qin Shi Huang”. This is to demonstrate the formal logic behind Qin Shi Huang’s promulgation of decrees and activities, thereby helping to better understand Qin Shi Huang’s behavior. The research method of this paper is literature reading, and the characteristics of Qin Shi Huang and the early decrees of the Qin Dynasty are analyzed by reading and publishing more than 20 related research on paper websites such as Google Scholar and Jstor. Finally, it is found that there was a rich theocratic color in the sacrificial activities of the early Qin Dynasty and the promulgation of Qin Shi Huang’s decrees.

**Keywords:** Qin Dynasty · Theocracy · Qin Shi Huang

## 1 Introduction

The Qin Dynasty was the first unified centralized dynasty in Chinese history, and its first ruler was named Ying Zheng (he will be referred to as Qin Shi Huang). During Qin Shi Huang’s reign, he repeatedly sought out alchemists (an ancient Chinese Taoist position) to pray for immortality. At the same time, he also held many sacrificial rituals to pray for God’s protection. From this, it seems that Qin Shi Huang’s belief in the existence of “God’s will” can be seen. However, it is one thing to believe in God. Whether Qin Shi Huang brought his belief into the implementation of the policy is the focus of the analysis below.

In the current research on the Qin Dynasty in China and the West, most of the studies focus on the discovery of details, such as Qin Dynasty art, Qin Dynasty sacrificial etiquette and so on. However, as a complete centralized and unified dynasty, every part of the Qin Dynasty should have some logical connections behind it. After all, one of the most striking features of a centralized regime is that the ruler’s consciousness interferes to a large extent with the implementation and promulgation of local policies. It is a pity that in the past period of time, there weren’t many articles linking the logic behind the different fields of the Qin Dynasty from a macro perspective. So far, this paper is aiming to point out this logic in my dissertation, at the same time map out the similarities between the Qin Dynasty and the Western theocratic dynasties at the same time and deduce the close connection between the early human political development and theocratic beliefs.

Which could help researchers get a higher level of understanding towards all the human history.

The “Qin Dynasty” explored in this article refers to a large, unified, centralized dynasty that existed in China from 221 BC to 207 BC. The discussion in this article is mainly based on the laws and regulations promulgated by Qin Shi Huang, the first monarch of the Qin Dynasty, and the activities he carried out. The literature references in this article are professional academic papers published on major dissertation websites. This article uses “theocracy” and “Qin dynasty” as the key words and has checked relevant literature from 2000 to the present on Google scholar, Jstor and other websites. In the end, about 20 papers were included in the discussion of this paper and played a crucial role in the generation of my arguments. The term “Ancient China” in the following article refers to all the history era before and included Qin dynasty.

## 2 Perspectives Analysis

Throughout the history of the Qin Dynasty, since Qin Shi Huang unified the six kingdoms, he created countless historical precedents. What is worth affirming is that every detail of the Qin Dynasty is worthy of being specially analyzed and explored. In this article, the analysis focuses on the two most prominent and important sections of the Qin Dynasty, namely the sacrifice link and the change of professional titles.

### 2.1 Theocracy in the Titles

The Qin Dynasty was the first unified dynasty in China, and its founder “Ying Zheng” called himself “Emperor”. This is the first time in Chinese history that the word “emperor” appears [1]. In this word, Qin Shi Huang borrowed the ancient “Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors” (in ancient Chinese myths and legends, the five leaders who made outstanding contributions to the expansion of territory and the development of civilization)) abbreviation. Qin Shi Huang’s use of the word emperor as his ruler’s name naturally has its own unique meaning; first, in the late Zhou Dynasty (a dynasty before the Qin Dynasty), with the gradual decline of the Zhou Dynasty’s military strength and local control, the princes of various places The kings called themselves kings in succession, like the famous “King of Chu Zhuang” and “King of Qi Xiang” during the Warring States Period in China, they were all leaders of vassal states rather than a dynasty. As the replacement of the Zhou Dynasty, Qin Shi Huang led the Qin vassal states to destroy the remaining 6 states. The title of “king” is no longer enough to cover Qin Shi Huang’s achievements in expanding the territory, so the emperor was created once to declare Qin Shi Huang’s status as the king of kings. The second factor is to demonstrate the rationality and legitimacy of his power status. As one of the vassal states of the original Zhou Dynasty, Qin Shi Huang launched a war to replace the Zhou Dynasty. In Chinese “Confucianism” (first proposed by the famous philosopher “Confucius”, is a traditional Chinese thought of respecting elders and emperors) is an act of infidelity and injustice. The word “emperor” was also called “the Son of Heaven” in ancient China. In the ancient Chinese traditional religious system, the Chinese are the “descendants of the dragon”, and the dragon is the “divine beast” of the human world in mythology. In this case, “the

Son of Heaven” is the pronoun of God’s will in the world. Qin Shi Huang called himself “Emperor” because of the title of the Son of Heaven, which means that everything Qin Shi Huang did was in accordance with the will of God. Naturally, it can become more legitimate in name, and it can also convince the people in the developed period of science and technology. It can be seen that Qin Shi Huang claimed that “the emperor has borrowed the name of heaven to stabilize his own rule, and this happens to be one of the peculiarities of the theocracy.

At the same time, the characteristics of the theocracy do not only exist in the name of Qin Shi Huang himself. After Qin Shi Huang took office, in order to maintain his own ruling ability, he changed the names of many natural landscapes across the country. Take the most famous “Yellow River” as an example, the “Yellow River” was one of the most important rivers in the development of ancient China, it provided important water resource and as an important place for fishing industry and transportation. The Yellow River was one of the most important rivers in the development of ancient China. It provided the Chinese people with a rich supply of water resources and a stable supply of food. Because of its soil deposits, it was called the “Yellow River” in parts of ancient times as well as in modern times. After Qin Shi Huang took office, he renamed the “Yellow River” to “the powerful water”. In order to use the power of “water”. In the system of Chinese Taoism, the world is composed of “the five elements”, namely “metal, wood, water, fire and soil”, and these five elements restrain each other. The Zhou Dynasty was considered to be a kingdom of fire in ancient times. In the Taoist system, the water element restrains the fire element. Therefore, the Qin Dynasty, which replaced the Zhou Dynasty, chose the water element to establish the country, and strengthened the ability of the water element by renaming the “Yellow River”. This phenomenon of believing in a supernatural ability with the power of the whole country is actually a manifestation of the idea of theocracy.

## 2.2 Theocracy in Sacrifice

In the biography of “the first empire” in “Shi Ji”, China’s first biographical history book, it mentioned, “In the eleventh month they reached Yunmeng on their journey and a sacrifice was made to Emperor Shun on Mount Jiuyi. They sailed down the Yangtze, inspected Jike and crossed Haizhu, passed Danyang and reached Qiantang. When he approached the River Zhe, the waves were terrible, so he went in a westerly direction for 20 li to cross where the river was narrower. They ascended Kuaiji, and a sacrifice was made to the great Yu. They also sacrificed to the southern sea, and set up a stone tablet with an inscription extolling the virtue of Qin” [2].

In China’s 5000-year-old culture, sacrificial culture has always been an integral part. As early as the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties (the three kingdoms of China before the Qin Dynasty), there was already a complete system of sacrifices. In China, there are two main types of sacrifices: sacrifice to heaven and sacrifice to ancestors. Different from offering sacrifices to ancestors, offering sacrifices to the heavens is a sacrificial activity conducted by the emperor as the leader and leading the people of the whole country. Qin Shi Huang was the first ruler in Chinese history to conduct large-scale mountain and river sacrifices and large-scale river sacrifices, river sacrifices in ancient China also known as “He Ji”, was using animals and foods as oblations to the “River

**Table 1.** Analysis of papers about Qin’s theocracy

No. of papers	Context of Qin’s theocracy	References
No.1	Theocracy In Title	[3]
No.2	Theocracy In Sacrifice	[4]
No.3	Theocracy In Title	[5]
No.4	Theocracy In Title	[6]
No.5	Theocracy In Title	[7]
No.6	Theocracy In Sacrifice	[8]
No.7	Theocracy In Sacrifice	[9]
No.8	Theocracy In Sacrifice	[10]
No.9	Theocracy In sacrifice	[11]
No.10	Theocracy In Title	[12]
No.11	Theocracy In Title	[13]
No.12	Theocracy In Title	[14]
No.13	Theocracy In Sacrifice	[15]
No.14	Theocracy In Title	[16]
No.15	Theocracy In sacrifice	[17]

God” to prevent the happening of flooding. During the few years when Qin Shi Huang established the Qin Empire, he carried out many sacrifices. Including Tai Shan (the mountain Tai in China) sacrifice, Yellow River sacrifice and other activities, and at his request, local officials built many ancestral halls (religious buildings in China used to worship gods). In addition, Qin Shi Huang himself also carried out countless religious activities in the palace. The most famous is to ask the “alchemist” (a position in ancient Chinese Taoism) to refine elixir for him, in order to pursue the “achievement immortal” in Chinese mythology, and he will live forever.

### 3 Analysis Table

In order to more intuitively show the role analysis of all citations and references in this article, this article makes Table 1 by classifying all documents linked to the discussion part with the linked part as the classification.

## 4 Conclusion

In Chinese history, whether it was Qin Shi Huang's creation of the title of "Emperor", or acts such as offering sacrifices to Mount Tai, people were all talking about it. It can be seen from the above that behind Qin Shi Huang's actions, is Qin Shi Huang's belief and reverence for the divine powers. This can be understood as a means of maintaining one's own rule, a means for the people to accept, or simply understood as the religious belief of Qin Shi Huang himself. However, whatever the interpretation, it is undeniable that Qin Shi Huang brought his service and respect for divine powers to the promulgation and execution of Qin Chu's decrees and activities. This is actually very similar to theocracy. In theocracy, leaders often claim to be gods or successors of gods to rule over the people. For example, the pharaohs of ancient Egypt called themselves gods, and the emperors of Japan once called themselves gods. Qin Dynasty, as mentioned above, Qin Shi Huang's behavior of calling himself "emperor" is actually reflecting that he has obtained the inheritance of "Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors" (characters in Chinese mythology and legend), thereby proving the legitimacy of his rule. And emphasize that they have the inheritance of "God". Renaming the Yellow River and offering sacrifices to the heavens are showing their strength, stabilizing the stability of the Qin ruling clique, and strengthening their rule by means of the supernatural power of the traditional Chinese "Five Elements". It all boils down to maintaining its own dominance by showing its connection to a "god". This article concludes that Qin Shi Huang's political logic contains a large part of the theocracy logic, and the theocracy model plays a pivotal role in helping Qin Shi Huang stabilize the Qin Empire's rule.

The study showcases Qin Shi Huang's behavior as a generation of emperors, as well as his contributions and sacrifices to ensure the smooth running of the empire. From a historical point of view, it is difficult to give an accurate and fair evaluation of a historical figure. From ancient times to the present, countless scholars and writers have given completely different evaluations to Qin Shi Huang. Based on understanding, all these comments restore the appearance of Qin Shi Huang himself to a certain extent, but I think if we want to restore a piece of history, restore a person. Seeing his own formal rules is the best way. I also believe that the research in this paper can inspire more people to study and explore the logic behind Qin Shi Huang's behavior in the future, thereby helping historians to better restore the history of the Qin Dynasty.

To sum up, it can be seen that although the Qin Empire was not considered to be a theocratic empire in its broad history. Qin Shi Huang himself and the general public's belief in supernatural power, that is, divine power, did influence the promulgation and decision-making of the Qin Dynasty and the Qin Empire. In addition, I believe that in the process of researching or restoring a historical event, although the derivation and deduction of logic are very important, the breakthrough of substantive evidence is even more crucial. It is expected that with the further excavation of the Qin Dynasty ruins by relevant archaeologists, as more cultural relics are unearthed, the life of the Qin Dynasty will be more clearly restored by scholars every day in the future. And this will be a major breakthrough in world history.

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