

# ANCIENT CHINA

LING

Qin Shi Huang's house servant  
Ancient China, 246 BCE





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'Ling, wake up! Today's the day!' Zhao Zheng's voice drags me out of my dream into reality. The aroma of rice porridge and pickled vegetables floods the house – breakfast is cooking.

'It's too early,' I complain. 'What is so important? I need rest to clean your household all day,' I point out sleepily.

My guilt trip doesn't succeed. 'Don't be like that,' he says. 'You know I don't think of you as merely a house servant. We grew up together. And we are both aware you do less work than any servant girl that ever lived,' he adds cheekily.

Zheng is right; we did grow up together – but in vastly different circumstances. He resides in this palace as the son of the king and I as a house servant. He was born into royalty and I into virtual slavery. My mother was a servant and this decided my future.

I hold my eyes shut until my curiosity takes over.

'OK, what is it?' I demand.

I notice that in his haste to wake me, Zheng has forgotten to secure his gold belt buckle. His yellow silk tunic flops messily over his shoulders. He has even neglected to tie his hair back in a knot. He is usually fanatically neat. Something big must be going on.

'Today I succeed my father and become king of the Qin Dynasty, Qin Shi Huang!'

'What do you mean? You can't, you're only 13!'

I make too much noise, forgetting that the royal residents are in morning prayers to their ancestors.

'My father has been deceased for weeks and the kingdom requires a new king – and that's me!' says Zheng. 'Prime Minister Lu Buwei will guide me until I am prepared for complete control.'

He yanks me off my bamboo mat and beckons me to follow him. I trail behind him obligingly out to the court yard, interested to see what he has up his sleeve.

'I arose early this morning to accomplish this,' Zheng says, as I set my sights on a sizeable pile of books in the middle of the courtyard. He passes one of the books to me.

'I'm a girl, you know. I can't read a word of this.'

'It's called "The Classic of History,"' he says. 'These are all the books I could find on Confucianism, Taoism, Mohism and all the other schools of thought. I'm going to burn them all!'

Zheng looks down at the books in disdain. He never had time for Confucius' teachings about

politeness, fairness and mutual respect. Lao-Tzu's teachings on yin and yang irritated him.

'All citizens will obey the Legalism school of thought from this day forth,' he says firmly. 'It only allows for obedience and law. So I must remove from society all books except those about war, medicine, engineering and agriculture – you know, the important stuff,' he says.

'Really, Zheng, is that necessary? You are not eight years old anymore; you can't stamp your foot to get your way. You do realise scholars can create more books to replace these, don't you?'

He ponders for a moment, then declares, 'You're right Ling. I must bury all scholars alive so they cannot write another book on weak, petty matters.'

I roll my eyes.

'You are so stubborn and barbaric – it's your way or nothing,' I say.

I am the only person who can speak so openly to Zheng. Our childhood bond forces him to endure cheek from me on a daily basis.

'OK, OK, you will be fond of my next idea, I promise,' he says. 'Come with me.'

'Ah-huh,' I mumble.

We set off together. An hour later we arrive by horseback at Xi'an, Shaanxi province. I dismount my horse and gaze around the neat farms. Our journey began with rice farms in the south and transformed to wheat farms in the north. There are a few peasants peacefully going about their day.

One farmer is struggling with the pole hung across his shoulders as the bags of grain on each end are very uneven, causing him to lose balance.

'There is something odd about him,' I whisper to Zheng. 'He is spilling most of his grain but seems unconcerned – and he keeps looking at us strangely.'

'He is just a stupid peasant, leave him,' orders Zheng.

I take Zheng's advice and disregard the farmer.

I hear the Yellow River flowing energetically in the distance.

'The speed of the river suggests that snow in the Himalayas is melting for the summer. I pray it doesn't flood again this year, Zheng.'

I get no response. I turn around.

'Zheng?'

Zheng darts into the distance, throws his arms in the air and announces, 'This space will become my magnificent tomb!'

I stare at him, arms crossed and eyebrows raised. After a moment of silence he tries again; 'I will create a burial site unparalleled in power and grandeur. I will bury thousands of soldiers and horses alive. That way, I will conquer heaven as I will earth.'

I laugh loudly this time, 'Wait a minute. This whole "buried alive" thing has to stop! Besides, what if the next world is not a continuation of this one?'

He looks at me, disappointed that I am not thrilled with his cruel idea. I try another approach.

‘Why don’t you bury a lifelike army instead? You could make 10 000 life-size soldiers out of clay or terracotta to guard your tomb. The terracotta soldiers could have different facial features, height and hair – just like a real life army.’

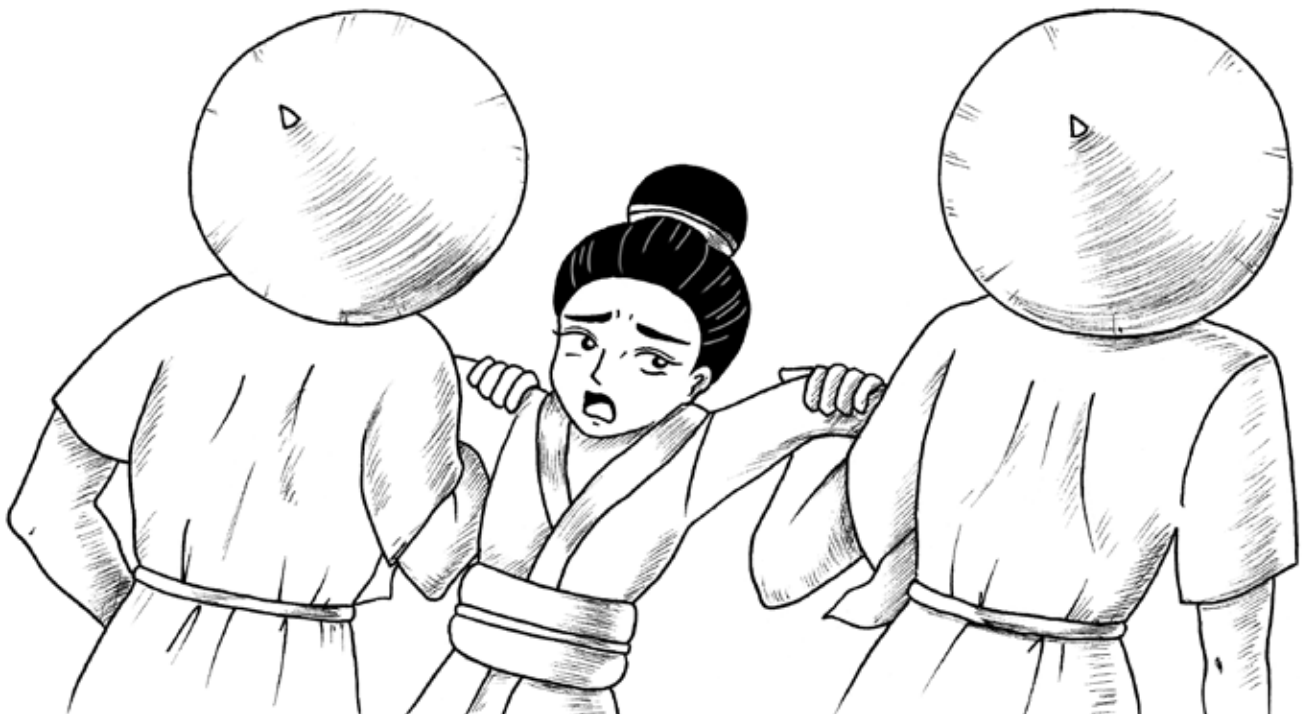
‘Oh,’ I add. ‘And you could bury weaponry and chariots so that the army is fully equipped. It will be majestic.’

Zheng’s quiet manner indicates he’s considering the idea. He will come around eventually – I know him too well.

Two men that were posing as farmers nearby suddenly and savagely seize me from behind. One of them is the strange peasant that

was watching me all along. They heave me backwards as I dig my feet into the ground. I use every ounce of my strength to resist. Screaming, I reach out to Zheng. He is furiously running back toward me. Zheng doesn’t get to me in time and I am thrust into a cart. I desperately kick, shriek and cry as the horses pull the cart away. I hear Zheng’s fraught calls for me growing fainter as the horses gain pace. These people are certainly Xiongnu – our bitter enemies who have a tendency to kidnap women and girls. I will no doubt be sold as a servant or as a wife to some horrid nobleman. I take a deep breath and begin my prayers to Ti for rescue.

We journey for many hours until we reach Xiongnu territory. I am kept tied to the inside of the cart and told not to create any nuisance – they will be back for me at dawn. I settle down for a nervous and gloomy night. As I wait, I listen to the sounds drifting in from nearby. The clinking and clanking of the tools being



used to build fortifications form a melody. I hear the moans of the tired workers as they work through their pain.

I don't have to wait long. I soon hear the rumble of an approaching army. I knew it! Zheng is coming for me. The roar of the horses and chariots is getting louder. The clatters of Xiongnu scurrying to find their weapons escalates too. I am tied down too low to see out of the cart so I can't see what is taking place. I flinch as I hear the clashing of swords, horses rumbling and the swooping of crossbows. Without warning, Zheng jumps into my cart. He is dressed in complete bronze body armour. He cuts the ties that are holding me hostage with his sword. Freed at last, I throw my arms around him for a moment before he pulls me off the cart and hoists me onto his horse. We dash away leaving the battling armies behind us.

We ride silently towards home. After travelling for a while I whisper the words, 'Thanks. I wasn't afraid – I knew you were on your way.'

He doesn't reply so I continue, 'I have more ideas now for your reign. First you must join the fortifications to form a Great Wall. An extensive, unbroken wall with thousands of watch towers will deny entry to foreign invaders like the Xiongnu. It is of no importance how many lives it costs to finish that Great Wall. This will be the only way to safeguard the future for this land. Next you must overthrow the other six warring states: our enemies the Han, Zhao, Yan, Qi, Chu and Wei. Bring them beneath your rule any way you know how – be brutal if you must. They are barbarians, I see that now. Our nation will prosper under one ruler – one law. Remember, it's your style or nothing.'



‘Well, well, well – isn’t that a change of tune! Now you want me to be a tyrant,’ he scoffs. ‘We are not eight years old anymore, as you pointed out. I can’t stamp my foot to get my way!’

‘If you want to achieve your ambitions, you must show no mercy, I get it now,’ I admit. ‘People will remember you for your brutality, not so much your achievements, but our nation will be stronger against the rest of the world as a result.’

‘Leave it to me. After I am done with this place they will name the whole country after me,’ he predicts.

I hope so. *No grief, no glory* will be the new motto for both of us from this day forward.

## KEY FACTS

- The history of Ancient China is divided into dynasties. It begins with the Xia Dynasty in 2200 BCE, and ends with the Qing Dynasty in 1911.
- The Ancient Chinese invented paper, the compass, gunpowder, matches, crossbows, acupuncture and fireworks, among other things.
- The Great Wall of China is 21 196km long and took over 2000 years to build. It was effective in keeping nomads in the north from invading China. But many lives were lost building the wall.
- The Yellow River is 5464km long. Much of the Chinese civilisation originated along its banks. It gets its name from its fertile yellow soil.
- Under the reign of Qin Shi Huang (Zhao Zheng), China was divided into seven warring states. He defeated the other six states and unified China under one rule, thus becoming the first emperor of China. The nation was so big that for the first time the rest of the world recognised it as another civilisation and gave it the name China after the Qin (pron. ‘Chin’).
- During his reign, Qin Shi Huang developed one written language and standardised measurements and currency throughout the land.
- Qin Shi Huang died in 210 BCE and was buried with thousands of terracotta soldiers in an enormous mausoleum.

# ACTIVITIES

## Great Wall of China Mapping Puzzle

Using the information below, plot the course of the new section of the Great Wall of China onto the grid on page 49. Mark guard towers with a circle.

NB. Each square on the grid equates to 10 x 10 kilometres. Co-ordinates are labelled (x,y).

1. To join with the existing section of the wall, the new section must start at (2, 1).
2. From this point, the wall extends 20 kilometres north.
3. The wall takes a north-east turn and continues until (3, 4) where a guard tower is under construction.
4. From the guard tower, extend the wall 30 kilometres east.
5. Continue the wall to (7, 5).
6. From this point the wall extends for 28.28 kilometres in a north-west direction to the nearest grid point. (Hint: Pythagoras' Theorem will be useful here).
7. Extend the wall 10 kilometres west, at which point there is a guard tower.
8. Continue the wall north for 10 kilometres to finish this section.



