

*Arts of Asia Lecture Series Fall 2012*  
*The Culture and Arts of China: From the Neolithic Age Through the Tang Dynasty*  
*Sponsored by The Society for Asian Art*  
The Qin and Han Unification  
Jeffrey Riegel  
September 28, 2012

*Records of the Grand Historian*, “Basic Annals of the First Emperor of Qin”

In the tenth month of his 37<sup>th</sup> year (210 BCE), while touring his empire, the First Emperor ascended mount Kuaiji and made an offering to Yu the Great. Facing toward the Southern Sea he erected a stone table on which was inscribed a hymn in praise of the virtue of Qin. The text is as follows:

皇帝休烈，平一宇內，德惠脩長。

The August Emperor, excellent and strong,  
Having pacified and unified all under the canopy of Heaven,  
His virtue and beneficence will last forever.

三十有七年，親巡天下，周覽遠方。

In the thirty-seventh year of his reign,  
He personally toured all under Heaven,  
Making a circuit of inspection of the distant quarters.

遂登會稽，宣省習俗，黔首齋莊。

He then ascended Mount Kuaiji,  
Having understood and examined the practices and customs,  
The black-haired people were careful and respectful.

羣臣誦功，本原事迹，追首高明。

All his subjects celebrated his merits,  
Having followed to their source the tracks of his deeds,  
They returned to the principles both lofty and bright.

秦聖臨國，始定刑名，顯陳舊章。

The Sage of Qin having taken over the government of the state,  
Having first fixed the chastisements and titles,  
Clearly set forth the old statutes.

初平法式，審別職任，以立恆常。

Having for the first time made uniform the laws and the models,  
And carefully distinguished the powers and functions of offices,  
He thereby established the immutable and the constant.

六王專倍，貪戾傲猛，率眾自彊。

The Six Kings had abrogated to themselves the right to rebel,  
Greedy and tyrannical, arrogant and violent,  
They led their masses to strengthen themselves.

暴虐恣行，負力而驕，數動甲兵。

Cruel and self-indulgent,  
Made haughty by their use of force,  
They frequently mobilized their soldiers.

陰通間使，以事合從，行為辟方。

Quietly conspiring and exchanging secret messages,  
To serve an alliance that united the north and south,  
They sought to accomplish their evil designs.

內飾詐謀，外來侵邊，遂起禍殃。

Within they covered up their deceitful schemes,  
While without they came to encroach on our borders,  
Thus giving rise to the disasters and calamities.

義威誅之，殄熄暴悖，亂賊滅亡。

With righteousness power he punished them,  
Exterminated and extinguished their violence and rebellions,  
These troublemakers and brigands were annihilated.

聖德廣密，六合之中，被澤無疆。

His sageness and his virtue are broad and profound,  
All within the Six Harmonies,  
Are blessed by his limitless bounty.

皇帝并宇，兼聽萬事，遠近畢清。

The August Emperor having united the universe,  
Listens impartially to the myriad matters,  
The far and the near are both rendered completely clear.

運理羣物，考驗事實，各載其名。

He wields principles amongst the crowd of beings,  
Testing and examining the truth of a matter,  
And for each recording his proper title.

貴賤並通，善否陳前，靡有隱情。

The noble and the base, both equally penetrated,  
The good and their opposite both being arrayed before him,  
There is no fact that remains hidden from him.

飾省宣義，有子而嫁，倍死不貞。

If one hides a transgression while proclaiming righteousness,  
If a woman already with children gets married,  
She has abandoned her dead husband and is not chaste.

防隔內外，禁止淫泆，男女絜誠。

He has built barriers between the inner and the outer,  
Forbidding and preventing licentiousness and excess,  
Thus men and women remain pure and true.

夫為寄猥，殺之無罪，男秉義程。

When a man enters the house of another to behave like a swine,  
He who kills him is not guilty of a crime,  
Thus men will observe the statutes of justice.

妻為逃嫁，子不得母，咸化廉清。

When a woman flees her husband to marry another,  
Children lose their mother,  
All reform themselves to be modest and pure.

大治濯俗，天下承風，蒙被休經。

His Grand Government purifies customs,  
All under Heaven receive his beneficent influence,  
And are blessed by his fortunate rules.

皆遵度軌，和安敦勉，莫不順令。

All adhere to the measures and pathways,  
Harmonious and peaceful they make efforts,  
None not abiding by the commands.

黔首脩絜，人樂同則，嘉保太平。

The black-haired people cultivate purity,  
Men gladly identify with the rules,  
Happily preserve the Great Peace.

後敬奉法，常治無極，輿舟不傾。

Posterity will reverently receive the laws,  
An immutable order without end,  
Neither cart nor boat will be tipped over.

從臣誦烈，請刻此石，光垂休銘。

His followers and servants singing of his strength,  
Request to carve their praise upon this stone,  
Brightly handing down this excellent inscription.

[According to those who saw the original tablet the inscription was written by Li Si and each character was four inches in height.]

**Some Recommended reading:**

Derk Bodde, *China's First Unifier* (Hong Kong, 1967).

Derk Bodde, "The State and Empire of Chin," *The Cambridge History of China*, volume 1, eds. Loewe and Twitchett (Cambridge, 1968).

Mark Edward Lewis, *The Early Chinese Empires: Qin and Han* (Harvard, 2007).