

The Tiger of Qín (*pronounced Chin*)

The Reflections of Zhèng (*pronounced Jung*), King of Qín



One tiger or two?

There had been centuries of war, but then came King Zhèng of the kingdom of Qín. First, the kingdom of Hán had fallen to him in 230 B.C. Then Zhào in 228, Wèi in 225, Chǔ in 223 and Yān in 222 B.C. King Zhèng had captured all the states of the old Zhōu empire except for Qí (*pronounced CHEE*). One by one, Qín had swallowed them like a silkworm devouring a mulberry leaf." As historian Sīmā Qiān put it

He was now 36 years old. Born in Hándān to a beautiful concubine, he had reigned since he was 13 in the Qín capital, Xiányáng (*pronounced See-EN Yahng*) City. He vowed to make it the capital of all civilizations, not just Qín. His ten-year schedule of conquests was almost completed. Then the world would at last be at peace after five centuries of wars, with all the old Warring States firmly under his

restraining thumb.

Alone, for once, King Zhèng paused to reflect on his life, something he rarely did. He took pride in his achievements, but something weighed down upon his mind. It was the matter of trust. Whom could he trust? He paced the room. Much had changed in the twenty plus years since his 13-year-old self had first assumed the throne.

Back when he was 13, the merchant Lǚ Bùwéi (*pronounced Lew Booway*), was his Regent and trusted advisor. He'd hold Zhèng's power for him until he was 20 and could hold it for himself. His jaw tightened as he reflected upon how his own mother and his own Regent had turned against him.

The story was long and sordid. Was his mother at fault, or Lǚ Bùwéi, who was not only Zhèng's Regent but his mother's first husband?

Yes, Lǚ Bùwéi had married Zhèng's mother in Hándān when she was just a dancer. but then Zhèng's father Zichu (*pronounced dz-choo*), the former king, had then taken her for himself. After his death, how could they resist getting back together again?



King Zhèng

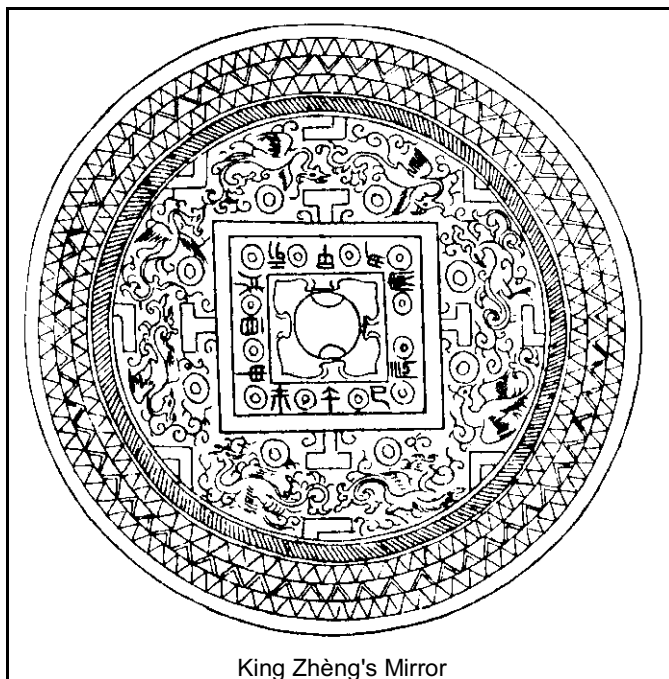
But the story was more complex and sinister than a simple love affair. A former slave, Lǎo-ǎi, had somehow escaped a slave's normal castration. It was he, and not Lǚ Bùwéi, nor King Zichu, who had fathered the two boys that Zhèng's mother had borne in secret and were now positioned wrest the throne for themselves. At least Zhèng had heard it told that way. They'd install the two boys before Zhèng could assume full power apart from the Regent. Zhèng had had to act swiftly. Lǎo-ǎi, and all his relatives to the third degree, were executed, as were the two boys. Any and all families who'd helped them at all had to give up their property and move south into exile in Szechuan. 4000 families in all.

Zhèng's heart had cried out for vengeance upon Lǚ Bùwéi, but he also couldn't bring himself to execute an old and trusted advisor, especially when many important men now spoke up in his behalf. In the end, he sent Lǚ Bùwéi east to Zhèng's property in Luòyáng, never to be the prime minister again. Zhèng also banished his mother to Yung, one of the early Qín capitals.

Zhèng reflected on the confusion his actions had stirred up. Minister after minister, 27 in all, had dared to object to his mother's banishment, and to his other harsh actions. So he had sent them one by one to their death in a boiling cauldron.

Then, old Mao, one of his most ancient ministers, had stepped forward and stated, in a voice both quiet and self-assured, that "Your majesty has a violent and arrogant character. You have no self-control. You have banished your own mother and ignored the advice of wise and honest men. Soon all the world will know of it, and none will respect you. Therefore, I fear for both you and your family. And that's all I have to say about it." With that, the withered old man had disrobed and hobbled over to the boiling cauldron.

Now, fifteen years later, Zhèng remembered how that simple act of courage had broken his rage, like a fever breaks. He had stepped down from his platform and taken the old man's hand. Remorsefully, Zhèng asked old Mao to become a special counselor, and, on Mao's advice, he had recalled his mother to the capital.



King Zhèng's Mirror

King Zhèng paused in his pacing long enough to pick up a brass mirror. He held it lightly, its surface reflecting his long fingernails. It was small and circular, and on the decorative back side, a long cord was tied to a knob in the center. He remembered this mirror from his early childhood. Its decoration symbolized the harmony of the universe, and how heaven and earth interacted to form all things. Zhèng sighed. It reminded him again of Lǚ Bùwéi and the amazing encyclopedia that he'd produced – it was a record of all the knowledge known back then.

Long after Zhèng had assumed full command of the entire Qín kingdom, he had kept hearing about wise and intellectual people visiting Lǚ Bùwéi in Luòyáng. Well, it was only natural that such a prominent author (and former prime minister) would attract visitors from time to

time. Many of these men had contributed to Lǚ Bùwéi's encyclopedia, which he had titled *Mr. Lǚ's Spring and Autumn Chronicles*, a title that brought to mind Confucius and his famous *Spring and Autumn Chronicles*. Lǚ Bùwéi had issued a challenge to anyone who could add or detract from its wisdom. Owing to Lǚ Bùwéi's powerful position, no one had dared take up the challenge.

Fingering the designs on the back of the mirror, Zhèng recalled the suspicions that had plagued his mind back then. Were the frequent visitors to Lǚ Bùwéi as innocent as they seemed? In the end, on the advice of his new prime minister, Lǐsī, (*pronounced Lee Sih*) he had decided to play it safe. He sent Lǚ Bùwéi, like so many others, down south to exile in Szechuan, and took back his land in Luòyáng. Well, Lǐsī just didn't believe in giving away so much land to friends. Then two years later, Lǚ Bùwéi killed himself by taking drugs. Maybe he'd figured that he had fallen so far from Zhèng's favor that if he hadn't killed himself, someone else might do it for him. Perhaps Lǐsī?

Zhèng stopped pacing the room, pausing in his reflections. He shook his head wistfully. It was all a matter of trust. Would he have actually had the old merchant killed in Szechuan, the man who had been like a father (or maybe an actual father) to him? Well, maybe. But he certainly wouldn't have wanted to.



King Zheng - back in his carefree student days (Tseng 1984)

He turned the brass mirror over to stare at his image in its polished surface. His unusually full beard seemed to indicate that he was a western barbarian. Well, what of it? Zhèng was proud of this beard. He fluffed it out a little with his long fingernails. For that matter, he was also proud of his long "barbarian" nose.

And he thought of his own feelings about foreigners.

The same year that Lǚ Bùwéi went into exile in Szechuan, another man from Hán had offered to build a canal to water the dry salty lands between the passes. But then he had modified its design to drain the water away instead, drying out those lands more than ever.

When his true purpose had been discovered, he was forced to change the canal back in exchange for his life. Yes, who can you trust? With maintenance that canal would be used for two millennia to increase the crops grown in Qín, and to strengthen it against its neighbors. So the untrustworthy incident resulted in the strengthening of Qín. So how much is trust worth, anyway?

But foreigners continued to stir up trouble. Well, enough was enough. All foreigners in Qín would just

have to go. But Zhèng's grand counselor Lǐsī (*pronounced Lee Sih*) had talked him out of it. The old philosopher had argued that sending away foreign men, while at the same time reveling in foreign treasures and foreign ideas, was a contradiction. The argument seemed to make sense at the time, so the order to get rid of foreigners had been taken back.

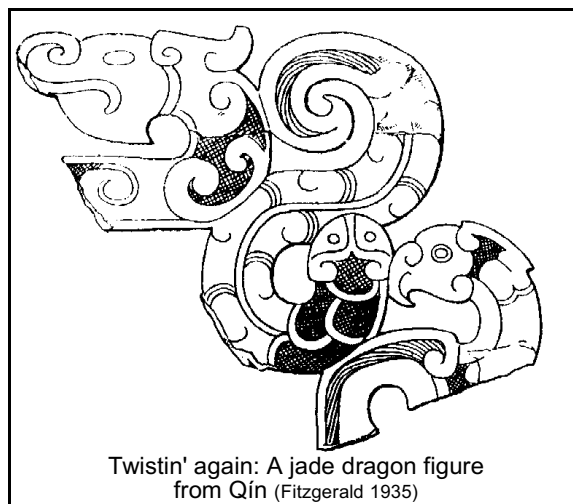
But it was also true that Lǐsī himself was a foreigner from Chǔ. So was he merely trying to save his own job? And if so, would that make him less trustworthy?

Caught up in thought, Zhèng once more commenced his slow pace around the room. Would Lǐsī's flimsy argument have been so successful with Zhèng today? Well, maybe. Zhèng usually trusted Lǐsī's judgments, whether or not he understood the reasons for them. And even one's own family can be more treacherous than a host of foreigners. In fact, that's why Zhèng felt so comfortable now with his new armies, made up of soldiers from every conquered land. Thus they were less likely to collude together and rebel. No longer was the Qín army just a regional force. Yes, it was a question of trust, of citizens, of foreigners. . .

Foreign or native, all had their place. This thought led Zhèng's meditations back ten years to that day when the great philosopher and politician Hán Fēi (*pronounced Hahn Fay*) himself had come to visit in Xiányáng City. The state of Hán, where Hán Fēi was a prince, was Qín's close ally. What a treat! Zhèng smiled into the mirror, remembering how much he'd looked forward to actually meeting and verbally dueling with that legendary author and thinker, whose books he had read and reread.

Hán Fēi's journey to Qín had all come about when the Qín army began its first moves to conquer all of the "lands within the seas." Hán would be the first state in that path. Hán and Qín had occasionally been allies, so to attack it now seemed treacherous. But Zhèng and his Qín commanders alike felt that old alliances should not hold back their army from its destiny.

So Hán Fēi had come from the King of Hán to arrange a peaceful settlement. Zhèng glowed as he recalled his first sight of the man, 47 years old and no longer young, but not yet elderly. Speaking to Zhèng, his penetrating mind uncovered and structured more than a century of Qín's history, showing how bad advice had led to missed opportunities and failed attacks. Otherwise, Qín could already be ruling all the other kingdoms!



Twistin' again: A jade dragon figure
from Qín (Fitzgerald 1935)

Hán Fēi's clarity and insights were spellbinding. They still brought chills to Zhèng's bones. Hán Fēi reminded the king that the other kingdoms continually formed and reformed alliances against him.

Well, such things had been going on for years. Zhèng's own agents, especially Lǐsī, continually broke up one enemy alliance after another.

Finally, Hán Fēi had reminded Zhèng about how the Hán kingdom had always been Qín's friend, even fighting battles for her. If Qín attacked Hán and eliminated that help, the other countries could more easily join up and destroy Qín. No, the best method was to keep Hán as a friend, whose advice and resources could help Qín conquer all the rest. His message delivered, Hán Fēi had then retired to a private room in the palace to await a reply.

But Lǐsī and the other Qín ministers had then come forward to King Zhèng to argue against him, pointing out that Hán Fēi was, after all, a Prince of Hán. Where did his loyalties lie?

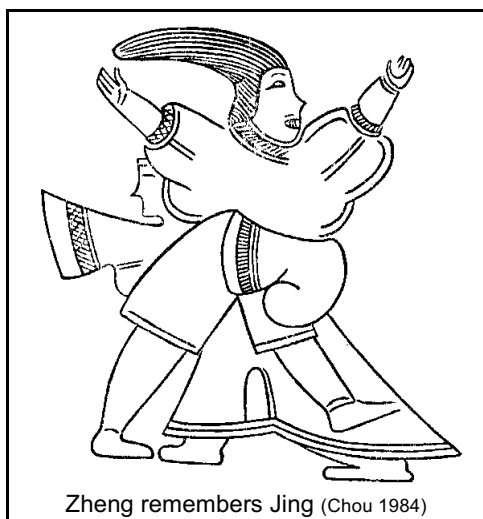
Furthermore, the Hán kingdom itself could prove to be a false friend. And Hán Fēi had probably just come to Qín to make a name for himself, and not to promote peace.

Now, over ten years later, Zhèng rubbed the mirror's reflective surface with his thumbs, blurring the image with the oils on his hands. He shook his head ruefully, recognizing how his own hesitation had been Hán Fēi's undoing. If only he had known then what he knew now! But Lǐsī's arguments had been unsettling. After all, he and Hán Fēi had once been good friends, fellow students of the famous old philosopher Xúnzi (*pronounced shūnzih*). It didn't seem that Lǐsī would argue against his old companion without good reason.

Zhèng had been talked into delaying Hán Fēi's departure for home, and then falsely arresting him, so the Hán leaders had a reason for why their messenger had not yet returned. While under arrest, Hán Fēi had somehow been forced to commit suicide by taking drugs. Who had arranged it? It must have been Lǐsī himself. Somehow, Zhèng felt sure of it. Even Lǐsī could only be trusted to a certain point. The old philosopher was not above bringing down people out of jealousy for their abilities.

Zhèng had later discovered that Hán Fēi, realizing what was plotted against him, had prepared a legal defense for himself. But Zhèng had been prevented from seeing it. By the time he had found out, it was too late. The great thinker was dead. It was such a waste, thought Zhèng, breaking his gaze from the mirror - I really could have used someone like that!

On the other hand, he did trust Lǐsī more than Hán Fei, not that his crafty prime minister was more trustworthy, but that Zhèng had holds over him. Lǐsī had so woven his life around Zhèng's personal power, that if anything were to happen to Zhèng, Lǐsī would be destroyed, a victim of his many intrigues. Zhèng smiled as he picked up a cloth to clean the surface of the mirror, and once more inspect his reflection. Removing his hat, his hair cascaded around his shoulders like a black shower. The occasional streak of gray filled him with pride, but it also reminded him of how short life was; and how close death can be.



Zheng remembers Jing (Chou 1984)

Over the years, there had been assassins, such as Master Jīng. How had the young scholar gotten so far through the palace without anyone searching him? Almost no one had come to his aid except his good doctor, to whom he later awarded 4008 pieces of gold. Going forward, he'd never let his location be known. Even the castle guards might not be loyal or trustworthy.

Yes, it's all a matter of trust. And no man sets out to conquer the world without expecting the world to fight back. And regrettably, such a man might need to break the trust of others in order to achieve his noble goal. He considered the friendly leaders of Hán and how he had broken their trust in him when he had conquered them.

He set the mirror down and shook himself, stirring from his reverie.

Great Yáo! He couldn't afford to just sit and stew about assassins! This indulgence in daydreaming was a waste of time. He was the Son of Heaven, as all the Qín kings had been, ever since his great grandfather had removed the Zhōu High King from his throne 34 years before. And thus, his intuitions had proved trustworthy. He no longer hesitated to rely on them. Heaven had given him wisdom, power, and more land than anyone since the ancient Yellow Emperor. Soon he would end forever the centuries of constant wars. Only Qí remained to be conquered, and the whole world, with all its wonders and magic, would then lie within his grasp.

The Success of Qín

The entire Civilized World is Unified for the First Time

In 221 B.C., Qí, last of the Warring States, fell prey to the "Tiger of Qín," as they now called the ruthless King Zhèng, its fall was a fitting end to the "Warring States" period, since at one time there had been talk of Qí and Qín dividing the Central Nation (*the middle kingdom*) between them. So much for that plan.

There was no turning back. King Zhèng, like a divine whirlwind, ended the centuries-long wars between the Warring States by beating the lot of them. Such wars would not likely start up again soon. For the first time in history, all the peoples in the Central Nation were united under the rule of one man, who imposed his own style of peace.

Zhèng's soldiers collected all the metal weapons in the empire, and brought them to his capital, Xiányáng City. There, they were melted down and recast as temple bells and twelve gigantic human figures, each weighing seventy tons. The Chinese people, like a dragon declawed and defanged, never forgave him for taking their weapons, but there wasn't much they could do about it.

Besides, King Zhèng would soon give them more significant things to stew about! Zhèng's "peace" would come at the price of a seething measure of violence, a fury not from any external enemy. This tortuous peace would last for fourteen years. People would struggle against each other: peasants against oppressive taxes and the corvée (forced labor), the rich against officers of Qín who would replace them. These Qín commanders would uproot old customs and traditions at will. Throughout the Central Nation, people would groan and struggle. In the end, the ancient order would be pounded out of existence, the people hammered into a new order, a Qín (or "Chinese") order. Such was the gift of King Zhèng, the Tiger of Qín.



Heavy Metal: A small statue from the Warring States Era. Did King Zheng's huge statues look like this? (Tseng 1984)

¹"China" is the English form of the name "Qín."