ClarkMUN XIII

The Fall of the Qin Dynasty

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Letter from Crisis Director

Greetings delegates,

I'm Kai Moore, and I'll be your Crisis Director for the Fall of the Qin Dynasty at ClarkMUN XIII. As soon as I heard that I could run my own committee for high schoolers, I knew that I had to center it on what I was learning about in my History of Traditional China class last semester. Professor Lex Lu often told us that Game of Thrones was totally inspired by the high-stakes drama of Chinese politics and society, and the further I progressed in class the more that I realized how true this was. I eventually landed on a crisis committee surrounding the fall of the Qin Dynasty because, on a 'political science, state-building, yada yada yada,' basis, this period is incredibly unique, impactful, and demonstrative of the flaws in authoritarian governance. But on a 'I just want to see a bunch of drama go down,' basis, I have never had more fun reading a textbook than while gasping over the political machinations summarized in Patricia Ebrey's *The Illustrated History of China.* To round out the cast of characters and add some extra chaos, I've also tweaked the timelines to throw in some of my other favorite figures from Chinese history.

So that's why I landed on the Fall of the Qin. As for why the Fall of the Qin landed on me, I'm an undeclared first year student with interests in Political Science, History, and Community, Youth, and Education Studies. I love thinking about the ways all three of these fields interact almost as much as I love thinking about the best ratio of chocolate milk to chocolate soft serve to make a 'broke college student milkshake™ ' at the dining hall.

If you're like I was at the start of this school year and know next to nothing about traditional Chinese history, don't worry! There are tons of great resources online, including those in the "Sources" section at the end of this background guide. But if you have any questions about how the committee works, feel free to reach out. Researching and planning for this committee has been a blast, and I'm excited to see what you come up with in March!

See you soon,

Kai Moore, Crisis Director for the Fall of the Qin Dynasty
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Letter from Chair

(TBD)

Introduction and Role of Committee

Qin Shi Huangdi, the first emperor of China and possibly one of its most reviled rulers, is dead. It has only been eleven years since the Qin Dynasty united China and the government is struggling to maintain order in the face of internal dissent. This determined and forceful emperor was the keystone holding the young country together. Without him, overworked peasants, disgraced aristocrats, and the foreign peoples forced out of their homelands are sure to seize upon the Qin Empire's weakness and overthrow the government. This would threaten the government endorsed supremacy of what would later be described as Fajia. Known in English as Legalism, followers of this philosophy believe that humans are inherently selfish and only the government and its authoritarian ruler have the power to maintain order.

However, there is hope yet for the Qin: while the environment of silence and secrecy that has been cultivated in the Qin court would normally result in the future of an entire country being decided by a few key ministers, you have had an odd stroke of luck. Meng Yi, one of Shi Huangdi's closest advisors, was the one to discover his body and quickly brought together several of the most important people in China in order to find a stable solution to the emperor's sudden death. Your ranks include members of Shi Huangdi's family, his most trusted ministers, soldiers from across the empire, the reanimated corpse of a folk hero, and more! It is up to you to decide who should rule the Qin Empire and whether the Legalist philosophy should continue to guide the state. The fate of what could become one of the most powerful empires in the world rests in your hands: Will you prevent the Fall of the Qin, or will you embrace it?

"No state is forever strong or forever weak. If those who uphold the law are strong, the state will be strong; if they are weak, the state will be weak."

– Han Fei in *Han Feizi: Basic Writings* (2003 Translation)

Background

The Rise of the Qin

There were once three great, ancient dynasties of China: the Xia, Shang, and Zhou, whose glory is referenced by politicians of all ideologies. But beginning in approximately 770 BCE, the feudalistic fēngjìan system saw the Eastern Zhou dynasty slowly dissolve into disparate states ruled by local strongmen. Thanks to having both military and administrative power, these hegemons defied the Zhou king as they battled to gain more and more land. The warfare of this era was infinitely bloodier than in previous times thanks to mounted archers, large infantries, and new iron weapons. Subterfuge, fighting on multiple fronts, and battles with thousands of casualties led to the goals of each state developing from not only gaining new territory, but destroying the military capacity of the other state. Training individual soldiers became less important in favor of numerical supremacy and a commander's ability to strategize. For centuries, chaos consumed the land as the Zhou Dynasty stood by, helpless.

When he was only thirteen years old, Ying Zheng's father died in 247 B.C.E. But the newly crowned king of the Qin State was not alone; his father's ally, Lü Buwei, served as King Zheng's regent and his mother, the Queen Dowager Zhao Ji, guided him as well. That is, until while the young king was away from court an ally of Lü Buwei and Zhao Ji attempted a revolt in 238 B.C.E. King Zheng successfully quashed the rebellion and eliminated his political rivals by executing the insurgent and his family, exiling Lü Buwei, and placing Zhao Ji under house arrest. Even though he was only in his early twenties, King Zheng had managed to consolidate his rule of the Qin State and install his associate Li Si as his new chancellor.

Despite King Zheng's success within the Qin State, six other great states had risen from the bloodshed of the Warring States Period: the Chu, Han, Qi, Wei, Yan, and Zhao. The other six great states traditionally saw the Qin as backwards and barbaric due to their being the closest to the hostile enemy tribes of the Rong, Qiang, and Di. But this had its advantages; because it was one of the peripheral states, the Qin were able to expand into territory not held by a rival Chinese state. The Qin State had also gained rich agricultural land after their victory over the Shu State in 316 B.C.E. Statesmen like Shang Yang and Lü Buwei had also promoted a new philosophy that Chancellor Li Si would later cement as the guiding ideology of not just the Qin State, but all of unified China.

This period was also known as the "Hundred Schools of Thought," when the rulers of each state recruited scholars from other states to advise them on how to gain the most power. Confucianism, Taoism, Militarism, Mohism, and other philosophies were all developed during this time. But the Qin turned to what would become Fajia or Legalism, a philosophy based in clear, harsh laws. The feudal division of the state was replaced with a system of centrally appointed governors. Instead of blood determining rank, the aristocracy was abolished so that the state dictated positions in society, especially in the military. While farmers were free to buy and sell land, the state directly controlled them through mutual responsibility groups that punished all

members for an individual's crimes. There was no room for private morality in the Qin State, as diversity led to disorder.

This strong autocracy worked to the Qin's benefit. The rulers were able to gear the entire society towards the wars against the other states, infrastructure such as the Zhengguo Canal, and rigorous reforms. By boosting agriculture so much (especially in the new, fertile lands they conquered) the Qin State was able to maintain a vast army of roughly a million infantry and twenty thousand cavalry.

By building upon his predecessors' achievements with his forceful personality and ambitions, King Zheng made swift work of the other states. First was the Han in 230 B.C.E. Then the Zhao in 228 B.C.E. The Wei in 225 B.C.E. Then the Chu in 223 B.C.E., the Yan in 22 B.C.E., and finally the Qi in 221 B.C.E. all fell like dominoes. King Zheng claimed that the Mandate of Heaven had shifted from the Zhou Dynasty to himself. He was no longer King Ying Zheng but Qin Shi Huangdi; the First Emperor of China.

As advised by Li Si, Qin Shi Huangdi enacted vast reforms. He abolished the feudal system in China as a whole and forced wealthy aristocratic families to move to the capital of Xiangyang, replacing the aristocratic system with 36 states ruled by a military and civil administrator. Through the construction of the Lingqu Canal and standardization of characters, weights, measures, coins, and even axle lengths, trade was greatly facilitated throughout the empire. Impressive architecture such as the Great Wall of China and the Qin Mausoleum began. However, while tourists today can greatly admire these monuments to human ingenuity, the laborers who constructed them (and died doing so) were less impressed. Many had been pressed into service as a form of taxation or as punishment for crimes. These crimes include the act of differing from the Qin's ordered standardization, such as by following local traditions. The Qin Empire had also forcefully expanded China's reach in battles against the Xiongnu in the North and the Baiyue or "Hundred Yue" in the South. The harsh treatment that ordinary people suffered while the state's rulers were constructing new palaces led to great dissent within the empire. Many Confucian scholars criticized the Qin Empire by comparing it disfavorably to the 'golden age' of the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties.

This led to the most infamous act of the Qin Empire. At the advice of Li Si, Shi Huangdi ordered that all historical records (except for those of the Qin State) and any philosophy writings (besides Legalism) be burned in 213 B.C.E. Tradition holds that 460 Confucians were buried alive. The punishment for using antiquity to criticize the present was death, not only for the offender but for their entire family.

This brings us to today; approximately late September in 210 B.C.E. in the Shaqiu Palace. But the Qin Empire is more than Qin Shi Huangdi and his allies' political antics; what else makes up this controversial state?

Environment

The Qin Empire encompassed not only what had been the Zhou Dynasty, but extended further North, West, and South. However, it was nowhere near as large as modern China. Instead, it largely consisted of what is considered “China Proper.” The river basins of the Yellow River and Yangtze River have a Type C or Temperate Climate. While the Yellow River Basin has hilly loess that is ideal for wheat and millet farming, its drier climate requires more irrigation. It is also prone to disastrous floods. Meanwhile, the Yangtze River Basin is warmer and wetter, making it better for rice and double-cropping.

Besides rice and millet, beans, ramie, melons, alfalfa, taro, turnips, and mallow were being grown as cash crops, with sesame introduced from what is modern Turkey and India as a source of oil. Due to the development of ironmaking techniques, farming tools improved greatly, along with various other agricultural techniques. Dogs, pigs, sheep, goats, cattle, and horses had long been domesticated by the time of the Qin Dynasty.

As previously mentioned, the Zhengguo Canal and Lingqu Canal were both constructed by the Qin Dynasty as part of a large irrigation network. It largely served the Yellow River Basin and had the capacity of 40,000 hectares of farmland. These channels could also be used for military transportation and trade, providing additional avenues for the Qin Empire to collect taxes from.

In this vast, incredibly centralized state, efficient transportation and communication were key. The Qin Zhi Dao or “Qin Direct Path,” is the first state highway in Chinese history, extending approximately 466 miles from what is now Chunhua County to Baotou through plains, mountains, grassland, and desert. Ranging from roughly 66 to 197 feet wide and made of tamped earth, it is estimated that cavalry troops could reach the border at Jiuyan from the capital of Xianyang in three days and nights. However, at this time it is still under construction, as supervised by General Meng Tian.

Economy

For centuries, China had endured interstate war and devastation. Although the competition fostered technological and cultural advances, it prevented a national economy from forming.

The Qin Empire attempted to rectify this with the aforementioned roads, standardized weights and measures, and national currency. While earlier Qin State officials had advocated for complete state control of the private economies, officials at the time of the Qin Empire instead advocated for state beneficion from private economies through taxes that produced resources, reducing costs in the state economy, and maintaining public order through clear explanations of rights and obligations, such as production quotas.

Although China had yet to see the immensely profitable trade along the Silk Road and Indian Ocean that occurred in later times, domestic trade had greatly increased. Soldiers in the Qin army were also rewarded with land that had been seized from other states, increasing the percentage of the population that owned land. But although the fēngjìan system was abolished and serfs were able to own the land they worked, their livestock and harvests were closely supervised by local officials. Public lands were managed by bureaucrats and worked by conscripts of the corvée system, which included prisoners of war, criminals, and innocent peasants. The high taxes and intense corvée labor demanded to build both nationally beneficial infrastructure, such as the Great Wall, Qin Zhi Dao, and canal system, and luxurious works like palaces and the Qin Mausoleum, placed great strain on the peasantry.

Early Han writer Jia Yi described the economy as a peacetime government emulating a wartime economy. This is congruent with the Legalist attitude of Shi Huangdi, Li Si, and other politicians, as the philosophy's goal was to make the state as powerful as possible in case of war. But while the Qin's strategy of surplus extraction ensured the funding of warfare and gave the central government more control over its local agents, the challenges of always seizing territory and the redistribution system that pitted bureaucrats against common people only further stoked rebellion.

Society

Social classes in the Qin Empire were clearly demarcated into twenty ranks, similar to many earlier states. Certain titles brought land, houses, and even titles for the children of the title-holder. Besides the previously mentioned officials, soldiers, and peasants, craftsmen also held a variety of positions in the Qin Empire. While some trades were under independent control, others were managed by the government. In these government trades, there were craftsmen who supervised other craftsmen and thus were officials on the same level as some of the higher ranks. On the other end, there were also craftsmen who were prisoner laborers.

A similar system of groups under the supervision of an elevated colleague existed for merchants. However, merchants were seen as on the same level as slaves and servants. They weren't allowed to establish their own households, were never given land or houses, and family members within three generations weren't allowed to assume governmental positions, and powerful merchants were sometimes even deported due to the threat they posed to government influence over the economy. These policies were justified by the Legalist belief that only farmers and soldiers were necessary. While some merchants such as Lü Buwei were able to gain immense power, they were few and far between.

Speaking of slaves, there were both government and private owned slaves. Privately owned slaves were ultimately the property of their owners; they could be bought and sold, given as part of a dowry or other gift, or even used to pay government debts. Government owned slaves were often criminals, relatives of criminals, or prisoners of war.

Throughout the Zhou Dynasty, a woman's role became increasingly formalized and the long-held division between the genders was strengthened. These categories were not created equal, as women were expected to obey their fathers, husbands, and in the case of widowing, sons. Because a woman would eventually leave her birth family for that of her husband, female children were seen as less beneficial to the family.

The Qin State and then the Qin Empire both forced migrations of millions. Between 213 and 210 B.C.E. alone, Shi Huangdi moved more than a million people from the interior of the country to newly conquered land on the north and south frontier. Many captured foreigners worked as agricultural slaves. Shi Huangdi also used forced migration on political rivals to either monitor, as with the thousands of aristocratic families forced to move to Xiangyang, or eliminate, as with the wealthy iron industrialists forced to the frontier.

China's polytheistic pantheon under Shangti, the King of the Gods, had formed by this time. Ancestor worship and divination had also both been practiced for centuries. The Zhou Dynasty were the first to claim the Mandate of Heaven, where a certain ruler or dynasty rules as long as they please the gods. When the Zhou Dynasty seemed to have lost the Mandate of Heaven by failing to maintain its power during the Warring States period, many states claimed that they had received it instead.

However, just as Shi Huangdi banned books on other philosophies, so did he ban books on religion in an attempt to maintain ideological unity. But although wearing amulets or carrying charms was a crime, many continued to worship the gods in secret.

Threats to the Qin

I hope that just as these background guides established the incredible achievements of the Qin Dynasty, so did it demonstrate its failures. Although the Legalists' intent had been to ensure the Qin Dynasty's success in war and maintain public order, the overbearing government control and harsh punishments did the opposite. People who have reasons to overthrow the Qin include (but are not limited to)

1) Surviving members of the ruling families of the Chu, Han, Qi, Wei, Yan, and Zhao states
2) The Rong, Qiang, and Di tribes whose territory the Qin State pushed into to gain power
3) Confucianists, Taoists, Militarists, Mohists, and those belonging to any other philosophies silenced by the Legalist government
4) Former aristocrats who lost their power;
5) Former serfs facing high taxes and corvée labor
6) Anyone who suffered a cruel and outsize punishment, especially if it was for a crime someone else had committed
7) Laborers who suffered while working on public projects
8) The Xiongnu of the North and the Biyue of the South, whose land is being seized by the Qin
9) Prisoners of war and slaves, for obvious reasons
10) Merchants, due to their low place in society
11) Those forced to migrate
12) Anyone who worships the gods
13) And, of course, many of the characters in this committee!

Besides these specific human threats, natural disaster, disease, and famine are also all dangers that face the young empire. Good luck, and have fun!

Crisis 101

The Fall of the Qin Dynasty takes place in the format of a crisis committee, so it differs greatly from GA and ECOSOC committees. However, delegates that are new to crisis may be surprised to find that there are still many similarities. This section shall go more into detail about what a crisis committee is and how to be an effective crisis delegate.

Crisis committees are single delegate events with 5-25 participants centered around a particular inflection point and the characters surrounding it. Whereas GA is an exercise in crafting thoughtful policy built to last and fix the world's problems, crisis is an exercise on short-term personal enrichment built off public scandals and secret agreements. Each delegate aims to assert their character's viewpoint and end the conference having amassed the most social, political, or economic power through both their out-room crisis arcs and in-room performance. This is some crisis terminology that will be important to remember coming into committee:

- Crisis Arc: Your personal storyline
- Crisis Note: Handwritten letters (same format as an email) to a specific individual designed to move your arc forward. Responses will be written from whoever the note was addressed to.
- Crisis Update: When the Crisis Director comes into committee and gives an update on what is happening in regards to people's arcs as well as bringing news of a problem that must be solved by the committee in a limited time frame
- Directive: Short term policy proposals drafted in response to a crisis or to carry out the overall objective of the committee
- Crisis Director (CD): The individual who determines what happens out of room and crisis updates
- Crisis Staffer: An individual working under the CD that collects, distributes, and responds to notes
- In Room: Refers to what is happening in the committee room (speeches, directives, etc)
- Out of Room: Refers to what is happening to/in everyone's arcs

A good crisis note should acknowledge the significance of the person the note is being written to, align yourself with this person, and establish a shared, clear goal. Moreover, the note should request a specific action on their part that is mutually beneficial or provides compensation of some sort as an incentive; provide explicit instructions; and most importantly, be plausible. In short, a good crisis note answers the Who, What, Where, When, How, and Why?

- WHO: Who are you reaching out to? Who are you asking them to contact / mobilize?
- WHAT: What do you want them to do for you? What do you want them to ask for?
- WHERE: Where is the recipient in question located? Do any special considerations need to be taken to get there?

- WHEN: When shall the action be taken? Why then? How might timing affect the action?
- HOW: How will the action be taken (be detailed - outline a step-by-step plan)?
- WHY: Why is the action being taken? Why should it be carried out in the way you are asking? Why are you asking them specifically to do this? Why should they help you?

Questions for Discussion

1. What philosophy would govern the Qin Empire best? How centralized vs. decentralized should the government be?
2. Who should rule the Qin Empire? How should rulers be chosen?
3. How will you maintain public order? By addressing dissenters' concerns, silencing them, or something in between?
4. How will the Committee handle the ideological differences within the Qin Empire? How will it handle these differences within the Committee itself? Is collaboration possible?
5. How can the Committee best use the Qin Empire's natural resources while preventing natural disasters?
6. What economic model will best serve your goals for the Qin Empire?
7. Should the rigid social hierarchy of the Qin Empire be changed?
8. Can any of the enemies of the Qin Empire become their allies? Or at least, *your* character's allies?
9. Will the Committee continue in the spirit of Qin Shi Huangdi, return to the ways of the Xia, Shang, and Zhou, or pursue a different route entirely?
10. How can your character pursue the interests of the Committee and the Qin Empire while pursuing their back-room interests?
11. And, most importantly: How will you rewrite history?

Characters

Note: Some characters are dead (Past) or haven't yet been born (Future) at the time of Qin Shi Huangdi's death. Their biographies are largely the same and the character background included here will clarify at what point in their life they are at, but feel free to adjust some details to make the character congruent to the time period.

Li Si
Li Si began his career as a junior clerk of common origin in the Chu State, but upon seeing the government's inaction in the face of opportunity, he moved to the powerful Qin State. Li Si rose through the ranks of Shi Huangdi's officials through his support of Legalist policies, ultimately becoming the Chief Minister. Li Si led the political unification of China through the standardization of coinage, measures, and writing; the abolishment of the feudal states; and the well known burning of the books and scholarly purge. Li Si justified this by saying that if people were constantly learning about the past and discussing ideas, then there would be dissent.

Zhao Gao
A distant relation to the ruling family of the former Zhao State, Zhao Gao was castrated as a child as part of the punishment for his parents' crimes. Although becoming a eunuch in the newly established Qin empire gave Zhao Gao and other eunuchs the trust to exclusively serve the women of the court and hold a variety of positions, they are seen as the lowest class of servants. Zhao Gao has risen from managing carriages, to attending on Prince Huhai, to becoming Shi Huangdi's chief eunuch and handling all of his communications with the outside world. He is also a talented calligrapher.

Fu Su
Even though Fu Su was Shi Huangdi's eldest son and the crown prince, the emperor preferred his younger brother, Hu Hai. This is possibly because of the humanity Fu Su displayed, even when it contradicted the law or his father's orders. This went against the core of Legalist philosophy, setting Fu Su against his father and the Legalist officials he employed. This conflict came to a head when Fu Su protested the burning of the books and burying of the scholars, warning that it would cause instability. Outraged by his defiance, Shi Huangdi tasked Fu Su with surveying Meng Tian's troops in the far North, where the crown prince has stayed, building connections amongst the common people of the North.

Hu Hai
Despite being Shi Huangdi's youngest son and the child of a foreign princess instead of a local noble, Hu Hai is doted upon by his father. From a young age, Hu Hai apprenticed with the minister Zhao Gao in order to learn the art of Legalist government. Although the young Hu Hai doesn't hold an official position, through Zhao Gao's tutelage he has toured much of the empire and established connections with many of the other new officials who were too young to remember much of the wars of unification. Out of all of Shi Huangdi's sons, Hu Hai was the only one allowed to travel with him on that final journey.

Wu Zetian (Future)
Originally from a well-off family, Wu Zetian originally joined the Qin court as a junior concubine upon the unification of China. She slowly rose from an almost secretarial position to serving as the Noble Consort, the highest rank a woman in the Qin court can have–except, of course, for the title of empress.

But Shi Huangdi never took an empress, despite Wu Zetian's clever political machinations and alliances with several officials that effectively eliminated the power of all other concubines. She was the only person that Shi Huangdi, famous for attempting to do as much work as possible himself, trusted to handle daily petitions and make initial rulings on the proposals of officials.

Meng Tian
A member of the famous military Meng family (which also includes Meng Yi), Meng Tian is one of Shi Huangdi's top generals. He led the conquest of the Chu State. When the Xiongnu began to invade land in northern China, Shi Huangdi sent Meng Tian and an army of 300,000 men to push the Xiongnu back. Having already proven his ingenuity through the supervision of the construction of a vast road system, Meng Tian has also begun work on what will become the Great Wall of China. He is currently supervising Crown Prince Fusu in his exile.

Modu of the Xiongnu
For centuries, the sedentary people of China and the steppe nomads of the eastern Eurasian steppe have battled. Modu is the son of Touman, the leader of the Xiongnu steppe peoples. Despite Modu's military talent and inventiveness, Touman favors another son and even sent Modu as a hostage to their Yuezhi rivals, expecting him to be killed. But Modu survived, impressing Touman with his bravery, and was appointed as the commander of 10,000 horsemen that Modu demands absolute loyalty from. He has been invited to this committee as an ambassador from the Xiongnu.

Zhao Ji (Past)
The woman who would become the mother of the first emperor of China went from a concubine of Lü Buwei to the wife of King Zhuangxiang of the Qin State. When the king died while Shi Huangdi was still young, Zhao Ji and Lü Buwei ruled the Qin State until he grew up. Less than a decade later, Zhao Ji's involvement with the failed rebellion of Lao Ai, a false eunuch and her lover, was discovered and Lao Ai and their two children were executed. Zhao Ji was banished from the royal palace, but she still holds great influence amongst the women of the court.

Shang Yang (Past)
The son of a concubine from a minor aristocratic family from the Wei State, Shang Yang long served as the Chief Advisor to several of Shi Huangdi's predecessors. Shang Yang was the statesman and reformer that laid the ground for Legalism, introducing ideas such as the rule of law and loyalty to the state above family. Despite his key contributions to the Qin State's rise, when Shi Huangdi's father rose to power Shang Yang was replaced by Lü Buwei and later Li Si, Han Fei, and other younger politicians. But Shang Yang still rules over fifteen cities to the West of the Yellow River and is frequently consulted in matters of government organization.

Lü Buwei (Past)
Born in the Qin State, Lü Buwei grew to be an incredibly wealthy and powerful merchant. It was only through his diplomatic work that Shi Huangdi's father even ascended to the throne. When King Zhuangxiang died young, Chief Minister Lü Buwei and Lady Dowager Zhao ruled in Shi Huangdi's stead. Desperate to rise to the same level as the aristocrats of other states, Lü Buwei employed many scholars. However, when it was discovered that Lü Buwei had helped Lao Ai secure his position as a false

eunuch, he lost the position of Chief Minister and was exiled to his fief in Henan, though he still holds great wealth and his position as Marquis of Wenxin.

Liu Bang
Born in a small village on the eastern coast of China to rice farmers, Liu Bang grew up far from power. However, through his force of will and charisma, Liu Bang married above his station and became a local sheriff in his native Jiangsu Province. His lowly responsibilities include collecting taxes and escorting prisoners, so he is greatly surprised when he's invited to the secret committee discussing the aftermath of Shi Huangdi's death. But Liu Bang isn't to be underestimated; he is a popular local leader and has strong ties with the lower officials of nearby provinces.

Xiang Liang
Xiang Liang is descended from the men who died defending the former Chu State from the Qin, including his father, the famed general Xiang Yan. After the unification of China, Xiang Liang lived as a commoner for many years. He fled to the former Wu State with his family after killing someone but managed to rebuild his life and even grow in influence due to his noble lineage. A fierce critic of the Qin State, he frequently advocates for the locals in dealings with local authorities. Meng Yi's awareness of Xiang Liang's rising fame is what pushed him to invite Xiang Liang to this committee.

Han Fei (Past)
A member of the ruling family of the former Han State, Han Fei studied together with Li Si under the Confucian philosopher Xunzi. Disgusted by the Han king's inability to maintain control of his state, Han Fei drew upon the ideas of Shang Yang and others to cement the Legalist philosophy, which advocates for autocratic rule over immoral people. While Li Si tried to convince Shi Huangdi that Han Fei was still loyal to the Han State, the then-king was not convinced and hired Han Fei as an advisor. Han Fei currently holds great ideological influence over the court.

Sima Qian (Future)
After the death of his father, Sima Tan, Sima Qian took over his role as the Grand Astrologer of the Qin empire. A prodigal scholar even from a young age, Sima Qian's duties include formulating the yearly calendar, helping the emperor with rituals, and recording daily events. But when Sima Qian criticized the book-burning policy, Shi Huangdi gave him the choice of either death or castration. In order to continue his father's work, Sima Qian chose to become a eunuch. He is currently a court archivist, with the same powers as that of the Grand Astrologer but with supervision of other archivists and higher pay.

Meng Yi
Due to the great trust Shi Huangdi placed in the Meng military family (which includes Meng Tian), General Meng Yi is employed as one of the emperor's ministers, closest aides, and advisors. He was one of the few people that the increasingly paranoid emperor trusted to ride in his carriage with him and stand close to him during court, leading to the rest of the court seeing Meng Yi as representing Shi Huangdi when he was not present. Meng Yi returned from a journey to pray for the emperor's health just in time to see him die. Although Meng Yi is the one that brought together this committee on Shi Huangdi's death, he is an equal member of the committee.

Zhang Liang
Zhang Liang had grown up expecting to serve the Han State as its chancellor, just as his father and grandfather had done. But when the Qin State annexed the weak Han State, he found himself forced to move to Xiangyang, the capital of the Qin Empire, along with many other aristocratic families. Zhang Liang exhausted his family fortune on failed assassinations of Shi Huangdi. While on the run from punishment for these attempted assassinations, he continued developing his subterfuge skills and forming connections with critics of the Qin Dynasty across the empire. The other members of the committee suspect that Zhang Liang was invited solely so everyone can keep an eye on what he's doing.

Xu Fu
Born in the former Qi State, Xu Fu nonetheless managed to rise to significant power in the Qin state as the court sorcerer. Due to Shi Huangdi's fear of death, he sent Xu Fu on a voyage to find the legendary Mount Penglai and the elixir of life. Although Xu Fu led a vast fleet with dozens of boats and thousands of sailors, he was reportedly blocked by a 'sea monster.' So Shi Huangdi sent him out again, this time with several archers to defeat the monster. Out of pure coincidence, an unlucky storm delayed his next voyage, allowing him to come to the committee on Shi Huangdi's death.

Zhang Heng (Future)
Born in Henan, Zhang Heng belonged to a middle class family. A prolific writer when he was young, Zhang Heng escaped Qin backlash against scholars by working in 'practical' fields such as mathematics, engineering, and geography. He worked as a minor official in Henan before moving to Xiangyang and replacing Sima Qian as the Grand Astrologer. Zhang Heng documented numerous stars and interpreted their movements through a religious lens; was the first to apply hydraulic motive power to a model of the celestial sphere; and, most famously, invented the first seismoscope. Despite Zhang Heng's great academic accomplishments, his controversial opinions (especially that the eunuchs have too much influence) have earned him many enemies.

Shi Yang (Future)
Shi Yang is a member of the Baiyue people, who faced intense pressure to assimilate after the Qin Dynasty's conquest of modern Guangdong. Her husband Zheng Yi, former privateer for the Âu Lạc polity of what would become Vietnam, united the pirates of the South China Sea. After his death, Shi Yang took control of the confederation. Under her governmental and military leadership, the pirate confederation became much more active and has consistently begun harassing the many states of the South China Sea. While the pirates could be a threat to the Qin Dynasty, so could they be the route to empire expansion. Shi Yang currently commands six fleets of 24 ships and over 1,400 pirates.

Fu Hao (Past)
Unlike everyone else in this committee who has a logical explanation for being here, Fu Hao is literally just a reanimated 1,000 year old corpse (She is otherwise human). Some see her as an omen of the Qin Empire's fall, others as the hero destined to save the Qin. She was one of the women that King Wu Ding of the legendary Shang Dynasty married in order to cement the allegiance of neighboring tribes. Besides being a landowner, she was the high priestess and most powerful Shang general of her time. Besides her reputation, Fu Hao also has the contents of her tomb, which include numerous weapons, tools, luxury items, etc.

Xian Zhen (Future)
Xian Zhen is the daughter of the chieftain of the Xian clan of the Li people in Southern China. Alongside her husband, the Chinese general Feng Bao, she helped spread Chinese traditions among the Li people and encouraged intermarriage. However, she still pushed for Li's autonomy from the Qin Empire, leading to her becoming a popular leader in Southern China. Government crackdowns on her and her allies have been numerous. Xian Zhen's greatest achievements include suppressing human trafficking, quelling rebellions, and increasing discipline in the local military. Xian Zhen also currently assists her son, Feng Pu, with local affairs, such as lawsuits.

Han Xin
Born and raised in Jiangsu Province in the Chu State, Han Xin saw the Qin State conquer his homeland as a child. Orphaned and destitute from a young age, he relied on the kindness of others. It was only when Han Xin reluctantly became a professional soldier in the Qin army that he began to rise in the world. He excelled in the army due to his long-time interest in military strategy and impressive swordsmanship. However, Han Xin is still relatively unknown, having only been invited to the committee because its members are sure that no one would dare start a fight with the young captain of the watch present.

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