

# *Comparative Study of Roman Empire and Qin Dynasty*

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**Abstract:** Rome is a great empire centered on the Mediterranean Sea and spanning Europe, Asia, and Africa. After the republic system collapsed, the political and economic markets of the Roman Empire underwent various changes, while the cultural and foreign policies remained unchanged. The Qin Dynasty, the representative of the eastern empire, was the first unified feudal dynasty in ancient China. This paper presents a comparative study of Rome and the Qin Dynasty from the aspect of politics, economy, culture, and foreign policies. Roman's political power was concentrated and spread out, as the power was controlled by the Senate and the Roman emperor. Meanwhile, the power within the Qin dynasty was highly concentrated in the hands of the emperor. Roman Culture is centered around religion, while the culture of the Qin dynasty is quite different. The mainstream thought was legalism, so the influence of religion was very tiny in the Qin Empire. Roman had a diverse economy, but the Qin dynasty implemented land nationalization, controlled commercial activities, and unified market management. Rome's foreign policy was complex, and they used multiple tactics to deal with different nations, while the Qin Dynasty's foreign policy aimed to resist foreign enemies. For example, the Qin Dynasty built the Great Wall, whose primary function was to resist the Huns.

**Keywords:** Comparative study, Qin Dynasty, Roman Empire

## 1. Introduction

Qin Dynasty and Rome, two empires that existed almost simultaneously in history, were different in politics, economy, culture, and diplomacy. As massive economies and imperial forms in the same period, both influenced the development of eastern and Western civilizations to a certain extent, which is also a significant reason for the further development of eastern and Western cultures in modern times.

The Qin Dynasty was the first unified feudal dynasty in ancient China and the shortest-lived dynasty. From the unification of the six countries in 221 BC to the death of heaven in 207 BC, it lasted for only 15 years. While the Qin Dynasty was busy uniting the Warring States on the other side of the Earth, the Roman Empire had one of the most significant transformations in its history. The republic system collapsed, and the Roman Empire emerged along with various changes in politics and markets, while the culture and foreign policy remained largely the same.

The comparison of the two empires in different fields, political systems, economy, culture, and religions reveals the impact of the Qin Dynasty and Rome on today's eastern and western societies, which helps study modern history and politics. In the academic research of the Qin Dynasty and Rome, most studied the differences in a single field or the Han Dynasty. Detailed research on the comparison of various aspects between the two sides has not yet appeared. This study aims to fill this gap.

## **2. Roman Empire**

### **2.1. Collapse of Republic System**

Among the defining aspect of an empire, politics in the early Roman Empire seem to experience the most significant change. As the civil war between the two triumvirates ended the Republic system, Augustus made himself the first emperor of Rome. This apparent change in the system did not bring too much change in the Politics in Rome. For one, Augustus did not declare himself emperor by name but was proclaimed consul in the beginning [1]. Furthermore, the Senate still held power in appointing governors, and governors still had some military control. Octavian initially had sole control over politics and the military [1]. Later in his reign, Augustus consolidated his power to more like an emperor's. He granted himself the power of tribute and Roman censor [2]. All of these powers compound with the fact that he removed the chance of anyone getting consulship and pushed Augustus's position closer to that of an emperor [2].

Still, even though Augustus had tremendous power, the Senate remained a force to be reckoned with. They held administrative and financial power [3]. The Senate was able to conduct trial, manage public games, and control the province [3]. Although the Senate lacked Military power and control over the land, likely a way to limit their power, they were the most potent group beneath the emperor. In the provinces, they were usually governed by an appointed governor, sometimes by the emperor by the Senate. They usually held military control over their province and acted as a judge.

While the Roman emperor held great control over his empire, the Senate remained very powerful, with powers that could sometimes rival the emperor. Locally governors held great power, although they had to gain the trust of either the emperor or the Senate.

### **2.2. Culture**

The culture during the founding of the Roman Empire remains essentially the same. Before discussing Roman culture, it should be noted that the Romans borrowed heavily from the Greeks and Etruscans and mixed them into their culture. This is a recurring theme that can be seen throughout different aspects of Roman culture.

One of the most significant aspects of Roman society is religion, which contains Greek and Etruscan aspects. Many Roman gods can be directly linked to a Greek counterpart, and practices such as augury can be traced back to the Etruscans. The Romans considered themselves highly religious and attributed much of their success to religious piety [4]. The Romans dedicate around a third of the days of a year to religious activities. The state often was linked with religion. The emperor himself was given the title of pontifex Maximus or the leader of the Roman religion. The State Religion supported priesthood like that of the Vestal virgins was also an essential part of Rome's daily life [5]. Every family has household gods that they worship by giving different offerings [6].

Literature and philosophy during roman times take heavy inspiration from the Greeks. The most famous of Roman literature, the Aeneid, is a direct extension of Homer's Greek epics, which borrowed many aspects from it. Many writers in ancient Rome hailed from Greece. Philosophy takes secondary importance in Rome due to the widespread religion.

Roman culture is a mixed bag of different cultures and different systems. Borrowing heavily on Greek and Etruscans, the Roman developed their own unique culture with specific family order, defined society structure, literature, and philosophy that expanded on old ideas.

### 2.3. Economy

Roman Economy was very diverse; trading was a significant part of the empire's economy. Currency is the basis of a complex economy, and the Romans have their coins. Dating back to the republic era, the coinage during the imperial era saw a notable change in that the emperor's portrait was imprinted on the coin and acted as propaganda. As the coin spread throughout the empire, so does the emperor's image.

Trading was a major of the roman empire; since the empire controlled a vast and diverse territory, each province often had its regional goods that they would trade with each other. Roman also conduct various foreign trades with other nations [7]. Grain is the most common commodity [7]. The western part of the empire did not produce enough and relied on Egypt to produce much of the food.

There are multiple different things to facilitate trade. For one, the Romans controlled the Mediterranean Sea, which allowed fast transport of goods from port to port. On land, the Romans had an extensive Road system that allowed for faster travel and safer travel as legions usually station on the road.

### 2.4. Foreign Policy

As an expanding empire, Roman contacted various other groups of people. The Romans often alliance with other nations, conquered or not [8]. Rome would offer citizenship and protection of the Roman Empire in exchange; the other party is subordinate to the Roman and responsible for providing for the empire. Rome even sometimes made treaties with already conquered people to ensure that the empire benefited by keeping the conquered territory from revolting. In many conquered provinces, such as Egypt, the local government often had no significant changes. A Roman governor will oversee the province with Roman legions stationed there, but the locals would primarily make the ruling.

At the western frontier, Rome had various relationships with the Germans right outside of their borders, including military, trading, gifting, and plunder [9]. Aside from trading and movement of goods, the Germanic tribes often became part of the Roman army, whom the Roman empire relied on heavily later on.

Towards the East, the Roman empire was in constant conflict with the Parthian Empire. At the beginning of the Empire, Augustus stabilized the relationship between the two empires through intermarriage, and military conflict did not resume until much later [10].

## 3. Qin Dynasty

### 3.1. Politics

#### 3.1.1. Monarchy and Centralization in Qin Dynasty

The system of the Qin Dynasty is Monarchy and centralization. Perhaps because the state of Qin fought all year round in the spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period, the supreme leader of the Qin Dynasty had excellent power. Democratic decision-making takes time, and a dictator can most efficiently control resources and wars. The main feature is a dictatorship, and the supreme power of the state is vested in the emperor. This has achieved a high degree of concentration and power control and helped stabilize the country and achieve rapid unification. The significant

disadvantage is that the emperor's ability must be very high. Once there is a problem of bad decision-making, the country will collapse very quickly.

In order to stabilize and expand the advantages of the autocratic monarchy system, Qin Shi Huang carried out activities including unifying characters and currencies, destroying weapons, building roads, burning books, and so on. All this is for the emperor to hold all his power in his hands. For example, to maintain his authority, Qin Shihuang even burned countless ancient books of the six countries, resulting in the loss of historical records in the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties. At the same time, the establishment of the system of three officials and nine ministers in the central government and the promotion of the system of prefectures and counties in the local areas seem to strengthen the power of bureaucrats and can resist the supreme power of the emperor. However, all official positions are only empty and useless. The ultimate power, the power of the army, and the power to promulgate laws are entirely controlled by the emperor. In a word, the development of the system of prefectures and counties in the Qin and Han Dynasties and the system of provinces in Rome provided necessary conditions for the establishment of the autocratic Monarchy, that is, the deification of imperial power; both purposes were to strengthen the power of the emperor [11].

At the same time, the shortcomings of this system have been expanded in this way and set high demands on the emperor. Hu Hai, the second emperor of the Qin Dynasty, is incompetent, so he is entirely unable to resist the folk uprising, which leads to the collapse of the Qin Empire. Qin Shi Huang should take the blame for the collapse of the empire.

The legalist ideology promoted by Qin Shi Huang did not apply to the more peaceful Qin Empire then. It is because of the excessive taxes as well as cruel and severe punishments that the people's living condition has become very crucial. Legalist thoughts could help the government squeeze every energy, such as money and people, to achieve the government's purpose, which is also why the Qin Dynasty could be quickly unified. However, in the long run, or in peacetime, this will lead to the country's decline. Because the people have been oppressed for a long time, rebellion will come very soon. At the same time, the people's lives could not be improved, their creativity could not be brought into play, their ideas could not be improved, and their talents could not be selected. All of these were the consequences of the long-term use of legalism and also foreshadowed the collapse of the Qin Dynasty.

### 3.1.2. Political Heritage of the Qin Dynasty

On the other hand, although the Qin Dynasty existed only for 15 years, the Han Dynasty carried forward its political system. Qin Dynasty has a tremendous political heritage in later dynasties.

The establishment of a centralized power system made the Qin Dynasty the first unified multi-ethnic feudal state in Chinese history. The application of centralism also made the later dynasties the hegemonic position in the world before the industrial revolution, which profoundly affected the entire eastern civilization.

The bureaucratic system replaced aristocratic politics. It subverts the tradition that has been maintained for more than 1000 years.

The Qin Dynasty strengthened the emperor's supreme power and the feudal society's social form. However, the class gap between the upper and lower classes in the feudal society was too large, so the class contradictions in China have been extreme since then.

The Qin Dynasty also created the emperor system, the county system, and so on, strengthening the autocratic centralization mode. In a word, the complete set of state management systems established by Qin Shi Huang laid the basic pattern of China's political system for more than two thousand years.

## 3.2. Economy

### 3.2.1.State-Owned Land System

In the Xia (around 2070 and 1600 BC), Shang (1600-1046BC), and Zhou (1046-256BC) dynasties, the state ownership of land had already been implemented. It means the king is the only land owner and has the right to distribute the land to the nobles, vassals, and his other relatives.

After the establishment of the Western Zhou Dynasty, the king distributed the land to his brothers, uncles, and other meritorious officials to prevent the rebellion and resistance of aristocratic forces. This was also the first time “Feudalism” appeared in Chinese history.

In the Qin State, Shang Yang implemented a series of reforms for the economic and political development of the country, and the nationalization of land was one of its core contents. It centralizes and monopolizes land ownership, such as villages, communities, farmland, and residence. Most of this land is directly operated and managed by national government agencies, while only a tiny part of the remaining land is transferred to private ownership [11].

### 3.2.2.Agricultural Management System

In the Warring States period, agriculture always played a leading role in the social economy. In order to facilitate the development of agriculture, all countries have formulated related policies. Qin’s system is the most prominent of all.

At that time, people tend to do business instead of agriculture. In order to change this phenomenon, Shang Yang issued a series of decrees, such as increasing the tax on doing business, forbidding merchants to sell grain, and granting preferential treatment to those engaged in farming and weaving.

The state encourages economic activities conducive to agriculture, such as supporting family production. The Shang Yang Reform stipulated that if there are two men in a family, they must live separately, or taxes will be increased. In order to increase the agricultural population, the Qin Dynasty even recruited foreign farmers.

Moreover, to enable farmers to concentrate on agricultural production and prevent the intrusion of government officials, the government has also taken a series of measures. For example, the officials must improve their work efficiency and cannot delay their work; in this way, they will not have time to persecute the farmers. As for the grain collected from farmers, specific officials must strictly record and supervise the quantity. No one is allowed to cheat or gain benefits from it.

In order to expand the area of arable land, Shang Yang also issued a “grass reclamation law”. Since then, the area of arable land borne by every agricultural labor force has dramatically increased. Moreover, the government has also promoted cattle farming and water conservancy, alleviating farmers' hardship in their work. Because of the favorable agricultural policies and such a group of hardworking farmers, the agriculture of Qin developed rapidly and laid the foundation for the unification of the six countries of Qin [12].

### 3.2.3.Industrial and Commercial Management System

In the early Warring States period, Qin’s economy lagged behind that of other countries. It was not until 378 BC that the economy began to develop. Later, the state introduced the industrial and commercial management system, vastly improving economic development. The state has begun to control business activities. For example, people are not allowed to mint coins without permission. Moreover, the state also manages the market in a unified way. All goods sold in the market must be priced. Anyone who violates this policy will be severely punished.

After the state of Qin unified the six countries, there were many kinds of currencies and different units of measurement on the market. To facilitate the management of national revenue and



expenditure, the Qin dynasty promulgated the well-known political law of unified currency. This decree was very effective then and directly impacted for over 2000 years. The copper coins with round square holes initially formulated by the Qin dynasty were still in circulation at the end of the Qing Dynasty. They became a typical representative of Oriental currencies worldwide.

The state of Qin also unified weights and measures, which was the first time in Chinese history. Measurements of commodity transactions relied on them, so they directly related to the state's taxation.

Another field that Qin Shihuang unified was transportation, similar to the change in transportation in Rome. Before Qin Shihuang unified the Central Plains, all countries had no unified system. The size of carriages in different places was different, which meant that the roads in different places were also different. After the establishment of the Qin Dynasty, it was ordered that all vehicles in the country should use the same width gauge and stipulated that the distance between the two wheels of a vehicle must be six feet. The unified wheels will press the track the same width, and the vehicles will run faster and more smoothly on the road. This way, Qin Shi Huang built an unimpeded transportation network throughout the country. This is called "the same track for the vehicle."

### 3.3. Culture

Qin Dynasty has a high level of handicrafts, which is the world's top. It had outstanding achievements in sculpture, metal ware, lacquer ware, portraits, weaving, and embroidery. However, the Qin Dynasty did not perform well in philosophy or literature. It is hard to find some works of the Qin Dynasty that are still popular today. For example, books and studies on literature, mathematics, and philosophy. There are three main reasons for this: the short existence time, the natural military culture, and the mainstream ideology of the Qin Empire.

After more than a century of war, the state of Qin has formed an interesting cultural feature--the military culture. The evolution of military nature began with the implementation of Legalist. Through Shang Yang's reform, Legalist thought advocates that all people should "act according to law." On this basis, the Qin Dynasty formed a complete set of strategies for governing the country, paying attention to farming and war, adopting a strict criminal law, advocating centralized power, and so on. Later, with the development and expansion of the Qin Dynasty, the characteristics of military culture are reflected in the following points: the system of selecting the brave one to become the leader. In the Qin Dynasty, bravery was essential for judging successful leaders [12].

Moreover, other particular habits reflect the utilitarian values of the Qin people. The distorted values of benefits and losses and not paying attention to emotion. In other words, Qin people may be more inclined to great honor and law than their relatives and friends. This is entirely different from the general idea in the spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period. In the spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period, kinship can often compete with glory, law, and the national system.

In terms of religion, traditional religions such as Taoism have been seriously impacted by the changes in the social, political, military, and economic fields of the Qin Dynasty, and the strong cohesion of religion could not be reflected in the Qin Dynasty. With the supremacy of law brought by legalism, atheism has gradually developed among the people. The monopoly status of ancient religion is destroyed, and its influence has dropped to the lowest point. As early as the spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period, the importance of various schools of thought moved upward. Under the criticism of various schools, traditional religion has begun to divide and transform. As the mainstream thought of the Qin Empire, Legalism is the academic sect that most vehemently opposed religion and advocated the elimination of superstition.

The arts and crafts of the Qin Dynasty are of high level, especially pottery, clay, and metal objects, such as bronze tripods and Terra Cotta Warriors, which show the strength of the arts and crafts of the

Qin Dynasty and have a far-reaching impact on future generations. For example, the bronze chariots and horses of the Qin Dynasty are the largest, most complex, and most complete ancient chariots and horses unearthed in archaeological history. They are of great value to studying the smelting and bronze manufacturing technology and vehicle structure of the Qin Dynasty in China. These arts and crafts also reflect some characteristics of Qin culture. From the Terra Cotta Warriors at the mausoleum of the first emperor of the Qin Dynasty, we can see that the arts and crafts of the Qin Dynasty were all influenced by the legalist ideology and worshipped the highly realistic modeling rules. This is also an essential embodiment of Legalist ideology's meticulousness

### 3.4. Foreign Policy

During the spring and Autumn period, the diplomatic relations of the Qin state can be summarized as "making friends with afar while attacking from near", that is, attacking Han, Zhao, and Wei states while uniting the Chu and Yan state. This diplomacy not only consolidated the land conquered by the state of Qin but also destroyed the "vertical alliance" of the six countries and accelerated the pace of the unification of the state of Qin.

The empire's borders were marked on the north by connected border walls, which were expanded into the beginnings of the Great Wall. The primary function of the Great Wall was to resist the Huns. It is a large-scale public project that gathers the strength of the whole country.

Besides the Great Wall, the Qin empire is known for other engineering marvels, including a complex system of over 4,000 miles of road and one superhighway, the Straight Road, which ran for about 500 miles along the Ziwu Mountain range and is the pathway on which materials for the Great Wall were transported.

## 4. Conclusions

In conclusion, Roman's political power was both highly centralized and decentralized. While the emperor held great political and military power in Rome, he was not without the influence of the Senate, who regularly exercised their power. The autocracy and centralization of power were the political systems of the Qin Dynasty, so all power was concentrated on the emperor.

Roman culture takes religion as the center, and sacrifice and prayer are daily life. Moreover, they borrowed a lot from the Greeks and Etruscans and integrated them into their culture. For example, the Greeks deeply inspired the Roman era's literature and philosophy. However, the culture of the Qin Dynasty may take the law as the core, which is reflected in the high achievement of meticulous handicrafts, but without any achievement in the literary culture of the ideological field. Contrary to Rome, the mainstream ideology of the Qin Dynasty was legalism, which did not believe in ghosts and gods, so religion had little influence in the Qin Dynasty.

The economy of the Roman Empire was diversified, as all parts of the Roman Empire produced and traded various goods, including sea trade and land trade. The primary labor force in the whole society was slaves. However, in the Qin Dynasty, the state government operated and managed most of the land. As a feudal empire, Qin Dynasty mainly relied on farmers, so land nationalization was very important. In addition, Qin Shi Huang also unified the currency, weights, measures, and road system.

Rome's foreign policy was changeable, and it used a variety of strategies to deal with different people. Romans protected the places and people they needed to control in exchange for tax and dominance. In the case of barbarians, they traded and hired soldiers.

What is very different is that the foreign policy of the Qin Dynasty was straightforward, as if it was more for fighting. For example, the primary function of the Great Wall is to resist the Huns.

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