ABSTRACT

In BC 221, Shih-Huang-ti succeeded in conquering all the other six states and brought the Warring States period to an end. He thus accomplished the great task of unifying China and established the first centralized and autocratic government in the Chinese history. He became the First Emperor of China and ruled over the first united, multi-racial nation.

Soon after Chin-Shih-Huang-ti came into power, he enacted a series of policies concentrating power in the central administration so as to consolidate his government. He gathered all powers, including military and financial into a central control, thus preventing the provincial army generals from establishing any decentralised power.

Having built an empire on the ruins of the old feudal system, the question arose as to how this huge territory should be governed. The majority of the statesmen, who were slaves of tradition, would have partitioned it out among a number of feudal lords as had been the custom with the Chous. Such an idea, of course, was offensive to a man who wanted history to begin anew with himself. He declared that the feudal system that had been so disastrous to the Chou dynasty should never be again established in China and there must be no feudal lords. Accordingly, Shih-Huang-ti established a system of Prefecture and County (郡县制度) and divided the huge territory into thirty-six prefectures, each of which was sub-divided into counties, governed...
by agents directly responsible to him. One agent looked after civil matters, another looked after military affairs, and a third acted as a sort of inspector or intelligence officer for the Throne. Such was the form of government he introduced and such has been the form of government that has come down to modern times, although in two thousand years, it has undergone many changes in name and detail. All ownership of the land was vested in Shih-Huang-ti and so were its inhabitants.

This academic exercise consists of five chapters. The first chapter discusses the reasons why Shih-Huang-ti decided to implement such a commandary system. Chapter 2 explains how these thirty-six provinces were governed by the central authority. Most of the historians believed that in the Ch'in dynasty, there were only thirty-six provinces divided by Shih-Huang-ti. However, there were some controversies over the actual number of provinces. This is briefly discussed in chapter 3. Chapter 4 and 5 analyse the merits and demerits of this system and how it has become the form of government that has come down to modern times of China.