

Contingency and Historical Inevitability in the Development of the Qin Dynasty

Yanzi Guo^{1, *}

¹Department of finance, Beijing Wuzi University, Beijing, China

*Corresponding author: GuoYanziGuoYanzi@163.com

Abstract. The history of the Qin dynasty is highly contingent and inevitable, with many historical events occurring with a strong sense of fatalism and sometimes quite inexorably. The rise of the Qin dynasty began with the reappointment of Shang Yang by King Xiao of Qin. It was a fortuitous decision, but the encouragement of agriculture and the emphasis on the army met the requirements of historical development. King Huiwen of Qin continued to follow Shang Yang's changes and expanded Qin's lands, and Qin continued to grow stronger. For various reasons, Ying Zheng, the later emperor Qin Shi Huang, also ascended to the throne and unified the other six states by defeating six other states one after another. The cause of unification would have been accomplished by the Qin or other state by contingency, but the unification of the late Warring States was inevitable. However, after the establishment of the Qin dynasty, Qin Shi Huang made significant mistakes in the political and cultural policies, and the empire soon fell. It was inevitable that tyranny would lead to the state's downfall, but the end of the dynasty in just 15 years was somewhat contingent.

Keywords: Qin Dynasty, Historical Contingency and Inevitability, Chinese History.

1. Introduction

Marxism holds that historical inevitability and contingency are interdependent and complementary. A pure historical exists only in logic, as a general tendency of historical development expresses amid various contingent factors existing in contingency. At the same time, there is also an inevitability in contingency, and contingency is the expression and complement of inevitability [1].

Contingency and inevitability are not two isolated and static parts. These two possibilities sometimes exist in the same historical event, which can be interpreted differently by different people. By chance, the author means the part of an event that may or may not happen because different people make different choices and the time is different, often resulting in many different outcomes. On the other hand, it is the opposite of contingency in that it tends not to change because of human choices and is a general trend in historical development, law, and something that is bound to happen.

History is developed under the joint action of many inevitable and contingent factors, inevitability is embedded in and expressed through contingency. In contrast, contingency is ultimately determined by inevitability, and the relationship between the two is a dialectical unity. This requires us to pay attention to both the inevitable and the contingent factors when discussing historical issues so that the history we reflect on can have flesh and blood and be closer to the objective facts [2]. Studying and exploring the inevitability and contingency of socio-historical development requires a long and sufficiently historical examination of historical phenomena as a collection of processes and an exploration of the interconnections between the various historical phenomena in the process [3]. This is why we can study historical contingency and inevitability in the history of the Qin dynasty.

The whole socio-historical process is also like this, a movement in which many systems of law and inevitability are "intertwined". This is expressed in the interaction of many factors so that what is accidental is also inevitable, and what is inevitable is also accidental. Any specific historical thing is a discursive unity of this inevitability and contingency. The whole of history is a movement and development in the discursive unity of inevitability and contingency [4]. Throughout the 563 years of the Qin state (770BC-207BC) and the 14 years of the Qin dynasty (221 BC – 207 BC), people cannot help but sometimes lament the vagaries of fate and admire the majestic kings who, during this period, intertwined contingency and inevitability to form the unique history of the Qin dynasty. The

history of the Qin dynasty is also marked by the interweaving of contingency and inevitability, which makes the rise and fall of the Qin dynasty a contingent event but also an event that was bound to happen in the long history.

2. The Contingency and Inevitability of Qin's Transformation from Decline to Prosperity

This study argues that the beginning of Qin's wealth and power was a contingent cause. Successive Qin kings did what they could to make Qin rich and strong, but the actual rise of Qin, the author believes, came during the reign of King Xiao of Qin (381 BC -338 BC). He appreciated the strategies of Shang Yang (390BC-338BC) to enrich the state and strengthen the army. Because of the King of Qin's approval and support, Shang Yang could implement the Change of Law. This was a fortuitous development in that, like many other kings of Qin before him, he had aspirations to expand to the east, but he met a man of knowledge who did not bury his talents or suspect him of having ulterior motives.

The most successful thing about Shang Yang's Law was that it survived. Even though King Huiwen had been humiliated by Shang Yang, he did not abolish it for Qin's development. The King of Qin and King Huiwen chose to put the state's interests first. Here it is evident that both the king and the wise minister were integral to driving history and that even if either had not made such a choice, history would have been rewritten. Thus, the rapid development of the Qin dynasty was contingent.

The times made the heroes, which is why Shang Yang's Change of Law was carried out and preserved. The class system of the Western Zhou was no longer suited to the productive forces of the time, and those who reformed this order were the ones who adapted to the historical trends, and the country was bound to be strong. It was not easy to change the law because the classes in Qin were not very distinct, but it would not have been possible to change the law in Chu and Wei, where the nobility was substantial, and the classes were solidified. Thus, the development of the Qin dynasty was also inevitable, as objective factors helped it move forward smoothly.

2.1 Objective Factors

The development of the powerful state of Qin was also inseparable from the contingency and inevitability of the development of other states. Yan's remote geographical location and small territory made it challenging to achieve hegemony. Korea was not strong enough to survive on the backs of powerful states and did not qualify for hegemony. Wei also tried to change its laws but failed, and the country's territory was not together. During the expansion of King Huiwen of Qin, the territory to the left of Wei was annexed, and the country was in jeopardy. The weakness of these three states was inevitable, and the objective factors of territory and national power made them directly unqualified for hegemony.

After King Huiwen of Qin, the three states of Chu, Qin, and Qi were relatively robust, the most powerful of which was Qin. Therefore, Chu and Qi decided to ally, and Qin sent Zhang Yi to adopt the strategy of linking up the three states to break the alliance. Zhang Yi cleverly tricked King Huai of the Chu. The latter was a mindless and dim ruler and completely offended the King of Qi by attacking the Chu at a time when Qin and Chu were at war, causing the state of Chu to be significantly weakened and even destroyed after that because of the same ploy.

This exemplifies the contingency of the situation. Had it not been for Zhang Yi's brilliant plan and King Huai of Chu's reckless stupidity, the state of Chu would not have declined early and been on the road to ruin. The battle of Changping also brought about the downfall of the state of Zhao, which was not able to sustain a fighting force any longer, and this also shows how rare and fortuitous it is to have a wise man to help the king. Many talented men do not find it easy to be appointed to important posts, so it is rare for the king to find them, appoint them, and trust them.

Marx and Engels once pointed out: The whole internal structure of a nation itself depends on the degree of development of its products and its internal and external intercourse [5]. The state of transport was one of the most important cultural phenomena that reflected the level of social development [6]. The continuous development and perfection of the level of transportation provided significant help to Qin in its conquests. During the period when Qin was expanding its territory, it was also because of the convenience of transportation that Qin's conquests were replenished in time and finally won many wars. "The people became prosperous, and the state became rich and strong," Li Si has said.

2.2 The Inevitability of the King's Decisions Determined the Inevitability of Historical Development

As Professor Yu Gojin points out, the life of history is in its rich contingency. To use logical necessity to eliminate and cleanse history of its contingency, as Hegel did, is tantamount to throwing history into a pool of sulphuric acid and turning it into a wisp of smoke. This is a living "murder" of history [7]. Qi had always been a great state, but its attack on Song, a state of high cultural status, under the deliberate guidance of the Yan spy Su Qin led to other states having a reason to crush it, especially Yan, which had been humiliated. Under the leadership of Yue Yi, who had conquered seventy-two Qi cities in a row, down to the last two, the state was prepared to be destroyed by a scheme to reduce taxes. However, King Hui of Yan came to the throne and withdrew Yue Yi's official powers, and soon Qi recovered its lost territories, although it also lost its claim to hegemony. This period of history is highly fortuitous and dramatic, as Qi, a great power, was set up by Yan, a weak state, and was beaten to near annihilation, all with the inevitability of the king's decisions. Qi and Yan had long held a grudge, and the king was on the verge of success, but the ruler's paranoia caused all his efforts to be undone.

3. The Contingency and Inevitability of Qin's Unification of the States

By this point, the declining state of the six states had predetermined Qin as the final hegemon, but the accession of Ying Zheng was a very contingent event. Ying Zheng, famous as Qin Shi Huang (259-210 BC) in history, first became King of the state Qin and then became the emperor of the later Qin dynasty, which unified the other six states. His father, Zi Chu, was originally an unpopular man sent to Zhao as a hostage, but the merchant Lu Bu Wei took a liking to him and used all his family's wealth to help him; and also got the support of Lady Hua Yang, the favorite concubine of the King of An, who adopted him as her son, so Zi Chu became the crown prince without any problems. After a short reign of An Guojun and Zi Chu, Ying Zheng became the country's king. It was all a matter of fate that neither of the two kings was the most deserving person to be crown prince and died after a short period as king. All this was to the great advantage of Ying Zheng's accession to the throne and power, a coincidence that reflects the serendipity of historical development.

Ying Zheng was able to unify the other states, and it was bound to happen due to the general trend. As a young man, he reacted calmly at the age of 22 to quell the rebellion of Laozi and then exiled the powerful Lu Buwei. He was ruthless and sensible enough to express the ruthlessness of an emperor and his desire for power to the fullest, so he was an emperor capable of great things.

After solving the internal problems, Ying Zheng set his eyes on the six states and began the journey to conquer them. The inevitability of the six states was reflected in the fall of the state of Zhao. Qin used a counter-strategy to get the king of Zhao to kill his general Li Mu, and Zhao was left with no one to lead the army and the generals, so it fell quickly. It was only 30 years after the Battle of Changping, one of the countless tragedies in history caused by backstabbing. The Zhao king's inability to absorb the lesson because of his suspicious nature hastened the country's demise.

There were inevitable parts in the downfall of the six states, such as Jing Ke's assassination of the King of Qin. When Prince Dan of Yan asked Jing Ke to assassinate the King of Qin, it was inevitable that Jing Ke would fail, firstly because Prince Dan aimed to get Jing Ke to hold the King of Qin

hostage so that he would return the territories of the six states. This was a difficult task in itself, the King of Qin was a brave and resourceful man, and Jing Ke had no experience holding people hostage. Secondly, Qin Weiyang, Jing Ke's assistant, was not as courageous as the rumors suggest, and he was too fearful of coming forward in the Qin palace, so Jing Ke did not have his help. The most crucial point is that Jing Ke did not want to die with the King of Qin, he wanted to hold him hostage like Cao Mo held the King of Qi Huan so that he would promise to return to the land and keep his own life, so he did not take the king's life at first, allowing him to fight back. All these reasons led to the failure of this counter-attack. After the fall of the six states, the states were united.

Ying Zheng was able to unify the states because of the existence of accidental factors of historical development but also the result of the inevitability of objective factors. All six states failed to have successful reforms, and the state did not have a constant source of vitality. Moreover, the people wanted to live in peace after years of wars, and peace and tranquillity were the states' trends and the people's hearts. 4. The inevitability of the fall of Qin

However, the fall of the Qin dynasty came after only 14 years of unification, and the reasons for its fall were laid down a long time ago, and it was something that was bound to happen.

4. Reasons for the Fall of Qin

4.1 Cruel Rule

The historical rule of law and the approach to statehood and legislation led to a legal system in Qin that was different from the Chinese legal system after the Han dynasty [8]. In terms of the political system, a highly centralized central administrative system was established, further advancing imperial power's expansion and proliferation. "All matters under heaven, large or small, depended on the emperor" [9].

The excessive harshness of the law was also a manifestation of this. On the one hand, the legal practice of the Qin and its empire, guided by the legalist doctrine of "the rule of law", aroused the Chinese people's long-suppressed sense of law and strengthened the importance of law in society as a whole. However, on the other hand, it reinforced the Chinese people's inherent notion of law as a punishment, making it increasingly difficult for them to develop a sense of identity and affinity with the existence of law [10].

The guilt-by-association system was established in Qin, where ten people were punished for one wrongdoing, and many very harsh punishments were invented, such as chariot splitting. Qin II once consulted Confucian scholars about their views and responses to the uprisings of Chen Sheng and Wu Guang, and "the scholars either spoke of rebellion or theft. The Second Emperor then ordered the imperial magistrate to bring down the officials for those who said they were rebelling, which was inappropriate. All those who spoke of theft were dismissed." Qin Er Shi did not want to listen to the news that the peasant uprising was damaging the stability and peace of the country, so he had those who dared to talk about it punished by the imperial historian for speaking out of place.

Therefore, the ruthless laws kept society under a haze of high tension and pressure, and people dared not speak out and acted cautiously for fear of attracting death. This was also the reason for the people's rebellion after repression. The ideas of the Legalistst contributed significantly to the rise of Qin. However, after that, Qin failed to grasp the extent of development and intensified the brutal rule and exploitation of the people, only to intensify class conflicts and fuel mutual killing within the ruling class, thus hastening the downfall of the Qin dynasty.

4.2 Lack of Cultural Recognition

The six states did not agree with the Qin rule, causing discontent among the classes, especially the peasant class. The Qin emperor burned books and banned Confucianism, resulting in a blockage of the way of speech. He could not keep abreast of the people's thoughts and innermost ideas and prevented good cultural communication, and the people did not dare to express their views and were

always careful with their words. The people were in a state of fear and were under constant pressure, and Qin Shi Huang was unable to gain the support of the people.

Qin Shi Huang also did not attach great importance to the unification of culture. He reappointed Li Si, the successor of legalism, as his prime minister and advocated using force to suppress everything. Various countries crushed Qi for attacking the long-established cultural state of Song. Instead of learning his lesson about the importance of cultural development and unification, Qin Shi Huang focused on the five elements doctrine and tried to convince the people of the rationality of his rule, which was putting the cart before the horse. This is why it was inevitable that the fall of the Qin dynasty in the second century was bound to happen.

4.3 Over-centralised Rule

When Qin Shi Huang ruled, both kingship and centralized power peaked. He excelled in one person, “ignores the advocacy of enlightened dictatorship”, as written by Lü Bu Wei’s disciples in the Lü Shi Chun Qiu. The kings should open up the way to speech and not over-centralized power. He was aware of the efforts made by his ancestors and himself to unify the states, said Jia Yi, “to fight for the remnants of the six ages, to revitalize the long strategy and master the states, to swallow the two Zhou dynasties and destroy the vassals, to control the six hemispheres by following the supremacy, and to flog the states with a whip and a patrol”. So Qin Shi Huang was very concerned about his hard-won territory and power, but he failed to grasp the right degree. Excessive centralization of power only made the ruler gradually lose his ability to judge correctly and become too complacent to hear the authentic voice of the country.

5. Conclusion

From the time of the King Xiao of Qin, the Qin dynasty was on the historical stage of a strong state, with the efforts of the previous kings and the talent of Shang Yang. The constant expansion of land under King Huiwen of Qin, coupled with the unwise King of Chu, the wrong decisions of the king of Qi, and the distrust of the king of Zhao towards his citizens, were the reasons why they lost to compete for hegemony, leaving Qin the only one to be powerful. Qin Shi Huang was contingent on becoming king of Qin, and because of his outstanding talent, he was able to solve internal and external problems and unify the six states. However, afterward, he failed to master the cruel legalism and promote a unified culture, and his pursuit of over-centralized rule led to the fall of the Qin dynasty.

This is why we can study historical contingency and inevitability in the history of the Qin dynasty. The history of the Qin dynasty roared with expansion and unification, completing the first unification in Chinese history. However, again, it could not avoid the end of its fall, and the contingency and inevitability of history are worth considering.

References

- [1] Liu Shuguang. The Inevitability, Contingency, and Complexity of Social History. Huxiang Forum, 2009.
- [2] Wu Xianhui. The inevitability and contingency of the fall of the Nationalist regime in Nanjing. Journal of Huaqiao University (Philosophy and social sciences), 1993, 2: 37-41.
- [3] Chen Jie. A test of the spatio-temporal dimension of the unity of socio-historical inevitability and contingency. Journal of Shangqiu Vocational and Technical College, 2014, 13(4): 119-120.
- [4] Wu Wanlin. On Engels’ ideological view of historical development as the discursive unity of inevitability and chance. Changzhou: Changzhou Higher Vocational School of Health, 2009, 15: 55-56.
- [5] Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels. The German Ideology, Selected Works of Marx and Engels, Vol. 1. Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1972.
- [6] Wang Zijin. The Development of Qin Transportation and the Unification of the Qin State, Historical Review in Shanghai, 1989.

- [7] Deng Huan. “Cleopatra’s Nose: A New Theory of the Inevitability and Contingency of History, Journal of Xihua Normal University (Philosophy and Social Science Edition), 2014, 4: 51-56.
- [8] Liang Ningsen. On the Attempt to “Rule the State by Law” in the Qin Dynasty. Journal of Sanmenxia Vocational and Technical College, 2007, 20(4): 75-77.
- [9] Sima Qian. Historical Records of Qin Shihuang, Beijing: Central University for Nationalities Press, 2007.
- [10] Li Huijuan, Zhao Xiaochen. A Brief Discussion of the Relationship between Legalism and the Rise and Fall of the Qin Dynasty. Journal of Chun Teachers College, 2004, 23(1): 41-43.