



# China, from Earliest Times through 20thC

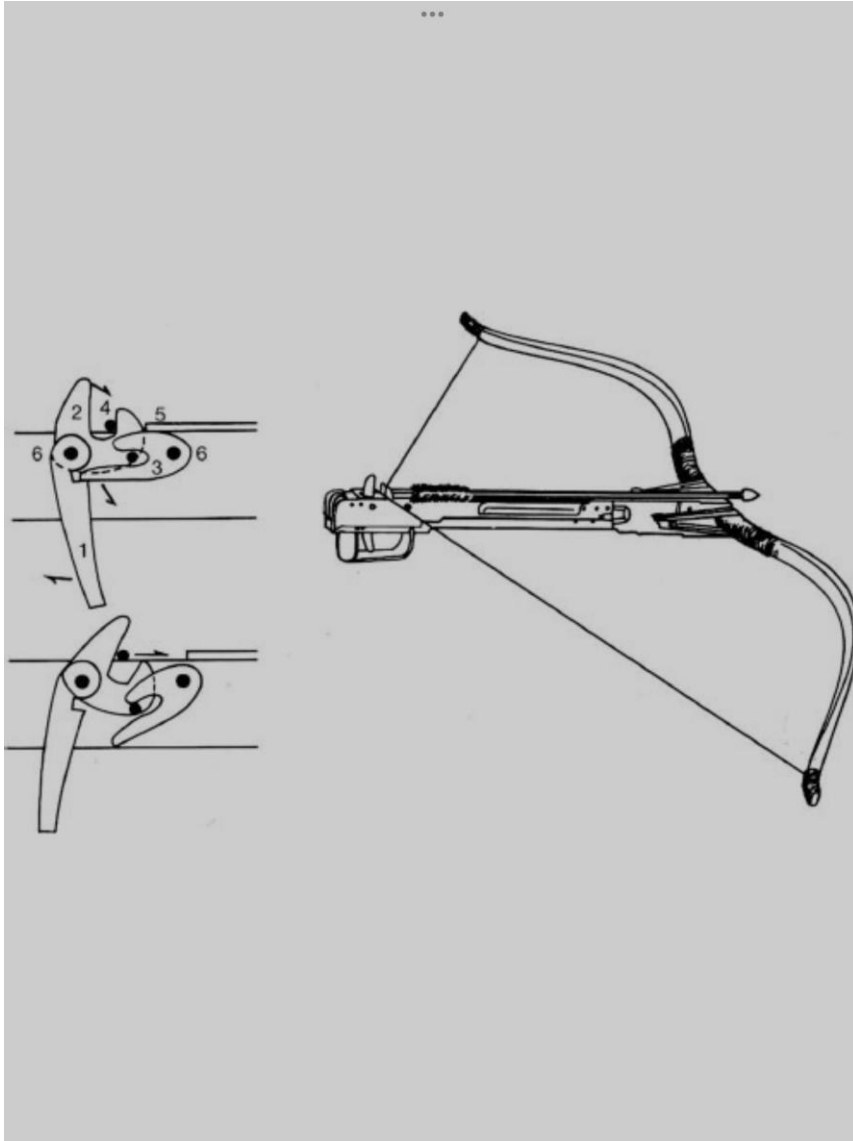
Fall 2025 Marist CLS  
Class Three

**Warring States  
476-221BCE**



# Warring States Period of the Zhou Dynasty

- The separate states of Zhou built dams, dikes, and irrigation canals to increase agricultural productivity
- This millet, wheat, soybeans, and rice supported standing armies of up to several hundred thousand.
- Iron gradually came into general use, permitting the development of more lethal weapons, which were increasingly used against other constituent states of the Zhou Dynasty
- By the third century BCE rulers began drafting thousands of able-bodied peasants as foot soldiers who replaced the old Shang and early Zhou forms of warfare led by aristocrats in chariots. Old chivalrous codes of warfare gave way to a more ruthless style of battle with no holds barred
- The “**Art of War**” classic from the mid-fourth century says:
  - “Warfare is the greatest affair of the state, the basis of life and death, the Way (Dao) to survival or extinction. It must be thoroughly pondered and analyzed.”
- It is still read today in military academies and business schools

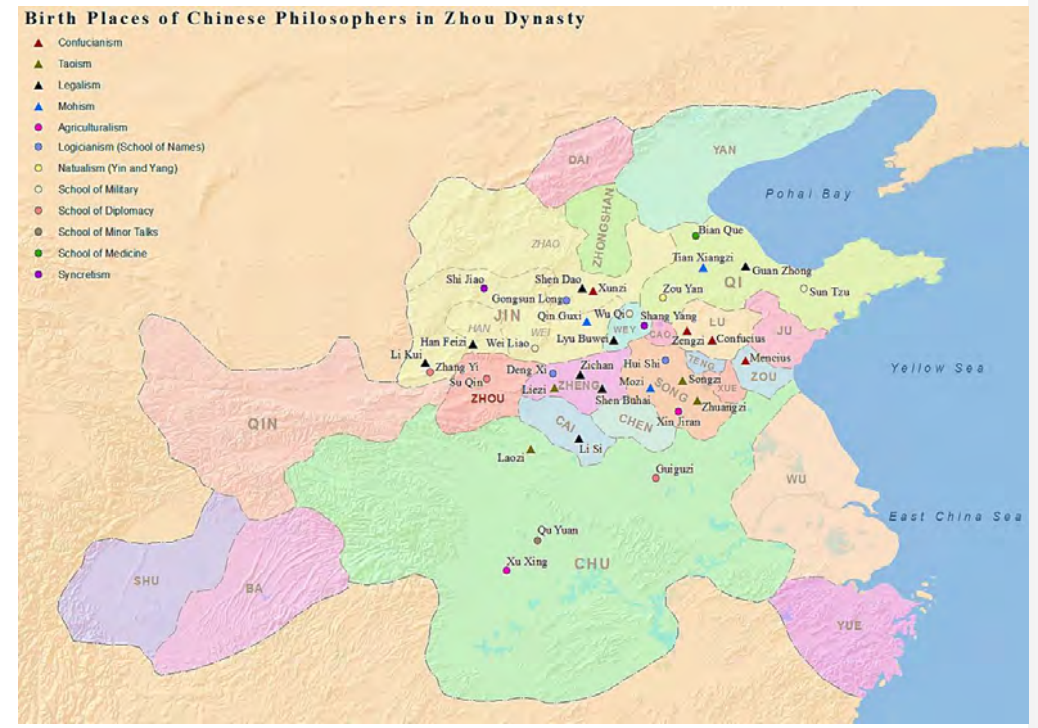


## Crossbow

- Easier to train soldiers on than the long-bow
- Earliest known example of “interchangeable parts” for the trigger mechanism
- Effective against horses and men wearing improved armor

- A variety of Chinese thinkers traveled among competing states debating central questions of the day:
- One of the most creative eras in Chinese history, One Hundred Schools of Thought, was dominated by the **Legalist School**
- Legalists guided and responded to many of the technological and organizational challenges. In Qin, rulers abolished serfdom, assigning land directly to peasant families, whom they taxed, taking a percentage of their crops.
- They drafted peasants as soldiers; promoted soldiers and officials by merit rather than birth; and enacted strict laws with harsh punishments
- Qin was organized toward agricultural production, increasing trade and the mobilization of all economic resources in the service of war.

## One Hundred Schools of Thought



- Born in 551 BCE, Kongzi, whom we know as Confucius, deplored the **Legalism** changes and called upon rulers to return to the beliefs and practices of the early Zhou
- He argued that the most basic human quality is our capacity to empathize with each other, a quality suggested by the virtue of ren
- All people have the capacity for kindness, he asserted, but it needs to be nurtured and encouraged through education, ritual, and the emulation of virtuous models, including one's parents, teachers, and great moral leaders of the past
- He wisely noted that people learn most not from reading books but from watching and emulating those around them.

## Confucian Ideals:

Benevolence: 仁 (rén)

Righteousness: 義 (yì)

Propriety: 禮 (lǐ)

Wisdom: 智 (zhì)



## The Way, or School of the Dao

- A third influential school was promoted by the **Daoists** and their interpretation of “The Way”
- Confucians and others that expanded upon his teachings meant “The Way” as describing how one should live, or the way rulers should govern
- For “The Art of War” author Sunzi, it meant the way of warfare
- **Two early Chinese texts:**
  - **Daodejing (or Tao Te Ching—**The Classic of the Way and Its Power)
  - **Book of Zhuangzi** , the concept of Dao has cosmic implications and includes such meanings as the first cause of all things, the totality of the universe, the laws of nature and all creation, and whatever is unchanging and everlasting.



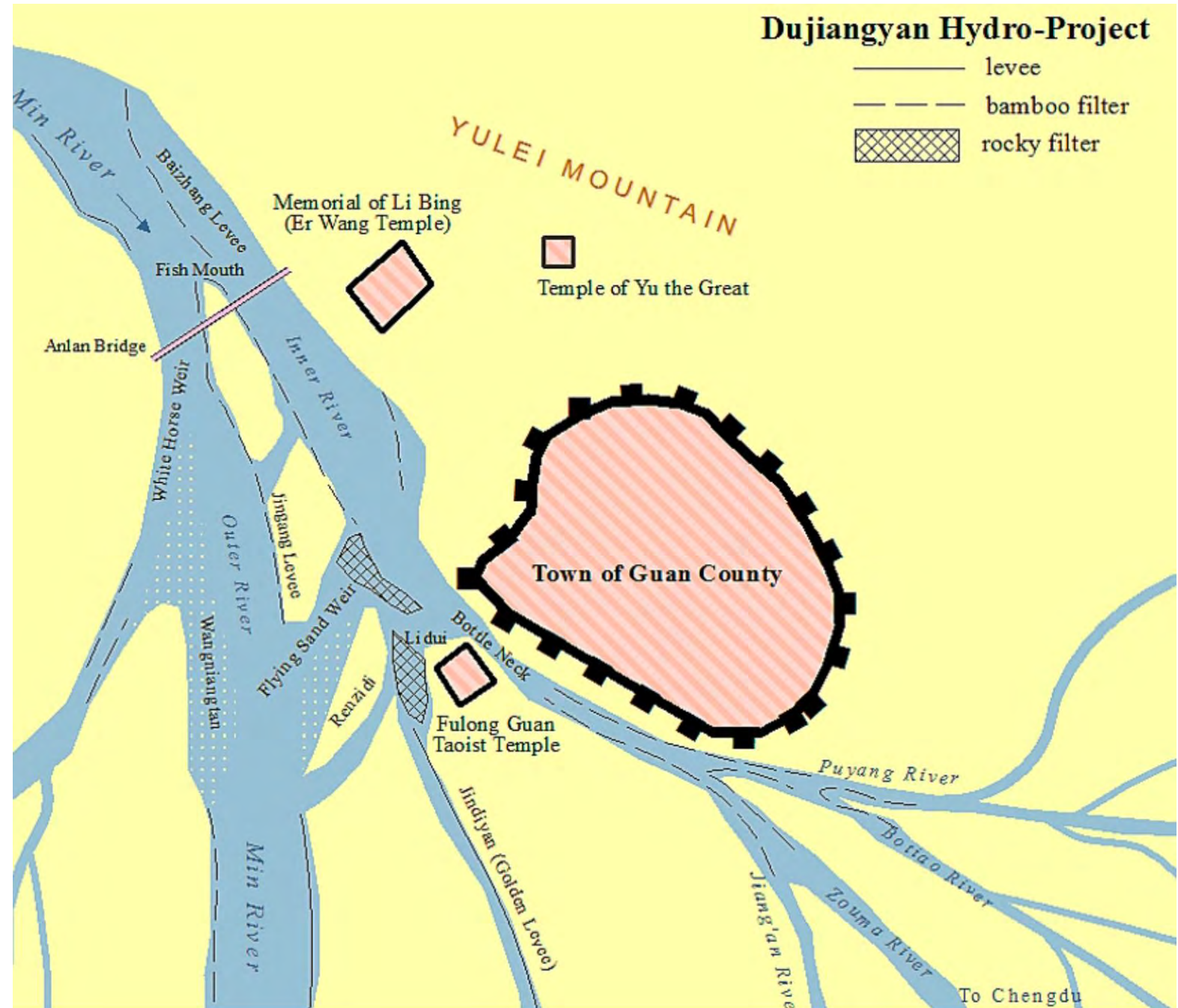
## Triumph of Qin

- Located in the poorer Northwest, Qin had fewer rich nobles to contend with
- Qin had been long exposed to the mobile fighting powers of the nearby nomadic peoples
- Over two centuries, its early adoption of Legalist methods advanced its war making capabilities



# Dujiangyan, Sichuan Province

- Still in use today
- Constructed circa 256 BCE
- Divided the Min River at a curve to control silting
- Qin increased revenue/feed armies
- NO DAMS were needed to irrigate and control floods!



# Dujiangyan Today





## The First Empire: The Qin Dynasty

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- After conquering the last independent state, the King Qin Shi Huang declared himself emperor of all China
- The emperor neutralized the aristocrats and ruled directly from his capital, aided by near-constant inspection trips, performance of religious rites throughout most of the country and a loyal army that was well-compensated
- This focus enabled massive projects, such as increasing span of the Great Wall, adding to current canals, constructing numerous palaces and commencing construction on his mausoleum (plus a separate “Terra Cotta Army”)





## Qin Dynasty: A Perspective

*“It is an auspicious moment for Qin Shi Huang to ascend to the throne; the country is united; no one will be dying on the roads.”*



- Later dynasties emphasized the Qin ruler’s negative qualities
- Mao Tse-Tung however viewed the Qin in a heroic sense
- New bamboo-scroll written finds from tombs suggest that the laws were enforced conscientiously with relative equality, fairness and with some flexibility.
- The First Qin Emperor, for all his paranoia and egomania, was a very capable and tireless monarch, who worked extremely hard in reading hundreds of memorials daily from every part of the empire.
- It created the centralized bureaucratic empire that became the institutional model for all subsequent Chinese dynasties up until the early twentieth century.

## Rise of the Han Dynasty



- When the first emperor died in 210BCE, the old aristocratic families moved to regain power
- Liu Bang, a minor public servant, had a major role in the ensuing revolt, capturing the current Qin ruler Ziying in 206 BCE
- Rewarded with kingship of a minor state, he triumphed over his rival by 202BCE, proclaiming his role as emperor of all China
- Liu Bang reduced taxes and annual corvee service, promoted Confucianism, and suppressed revolts. He also initiated the policy of granting tribute and marriage alliances to the nomadic *Xiongnu*, after losing the Battle of Baideng in 200 BCE
- Liu Bang directly ruled a portion of China and restored aristocrats to the rest, as local kings
- He gradually worked to limit the power of the remaining kings, by replacing them with his family members

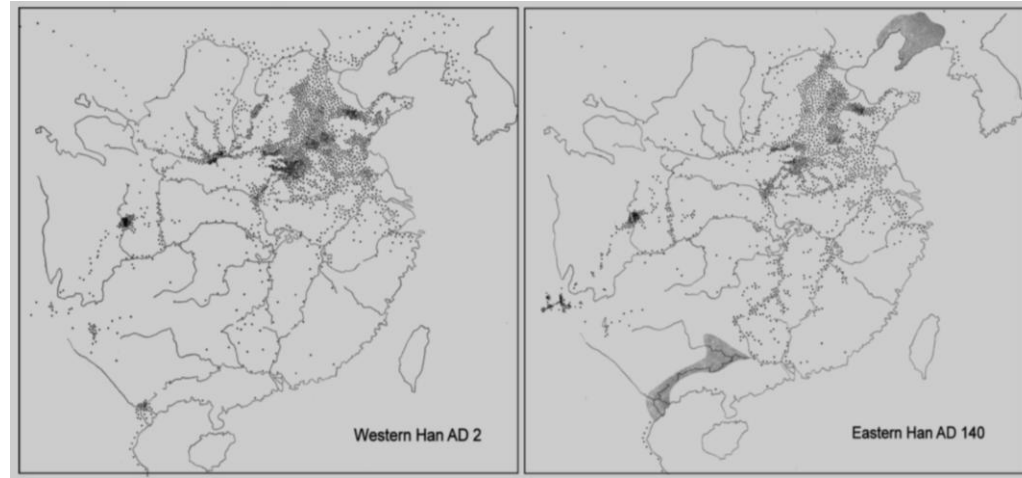


## Han Dynasty Expands

- Liu Che (Emperor Wu) 141-87 BCE maintained a strong centralized control through a hybrid of Legalist and Confucian policies
- Continuing raids by Xiongnu were countered by supporting other nomadic tribes
- Expanded into Korea's Ferghana Valley and Northern Vietnam; achieved the largest Chinese expansion for centuries
- Diversity of music and arts
- Trade through Central Asia fostered, boosted economy, new musical instruments & nomad's styles began to be favored by Han



## Han Dynasty Evolves



- Cost of expansion, especially wars against the Xiongnu resulted in declining revenues and weakening military power, especially in the turbulent northwest
- Settlers moved out of the area, despite attempts by central government to resettle them in frontiers (*see above*)
- Nomadic tribes that had aided in Xiongnu defeat were not assimilating well in China
- Richer land-owners took over more of the peasants' holdings
- Palace intrigues multiplied

# Warlords and Peasant Forces at the Beginning of Eastern Han



## The Break between Western and Eastern Han



- Larger land-owners gradually concentrated land and population in their hands
- Peasant revolts, especially with millenarian tendencies threatened empire stability
- **Wang Mang's** declaration of a new dynasty and his intended reform (9-23CE):
  - putting restrictions on the land area and the number of slaves a single family could own. Wang failed!
- The rebellions against Wang Mang's regime and the war fought before the founding of the Eastern Han Empire had laid waste to a large amount of land previously owned by families of high ranks.
- Seizing on this opportunity, **Liu Xiu**, the first emperor of the restored Han Empire, ordered a systematic survey of land as a foundation for redistribution.

# Land Displacement in Han Society



- The growing power of the great families and worsening conditions of the peasantry were two sides of the same coin.
- From the standpoint of the great families, the end of the great expansion achieved under the Western Han Empire and its inability to acquire new lands along the frontiers created for the Han social elites a condition where, in order to maintain their growing households, they had to exploit local resources.
- This was probably the most important dynamic in Han socioeconomic history. It previewed similar conflicts in the future dynasties

# Inventions



- The spread of learning was undoubtedly helped by the invention of paper in Han times, increasing the availability of books.
  - This invention – the pulp papermaking process ascribed to Cai Lun (c. 50–121 AD), a Han court eunuch – brought other benefits.
  - Paper proved an effective substitute for silk in many situations, leaving Han China with more silk to export, substantially benefiting the economy of the empire.
- A stable rudder for the “Junk” type of flat-bottomed vessel replaced the side-paddle steering method
- Earthquake sensing machine (at left) was developed to record intensity and direction of the quake

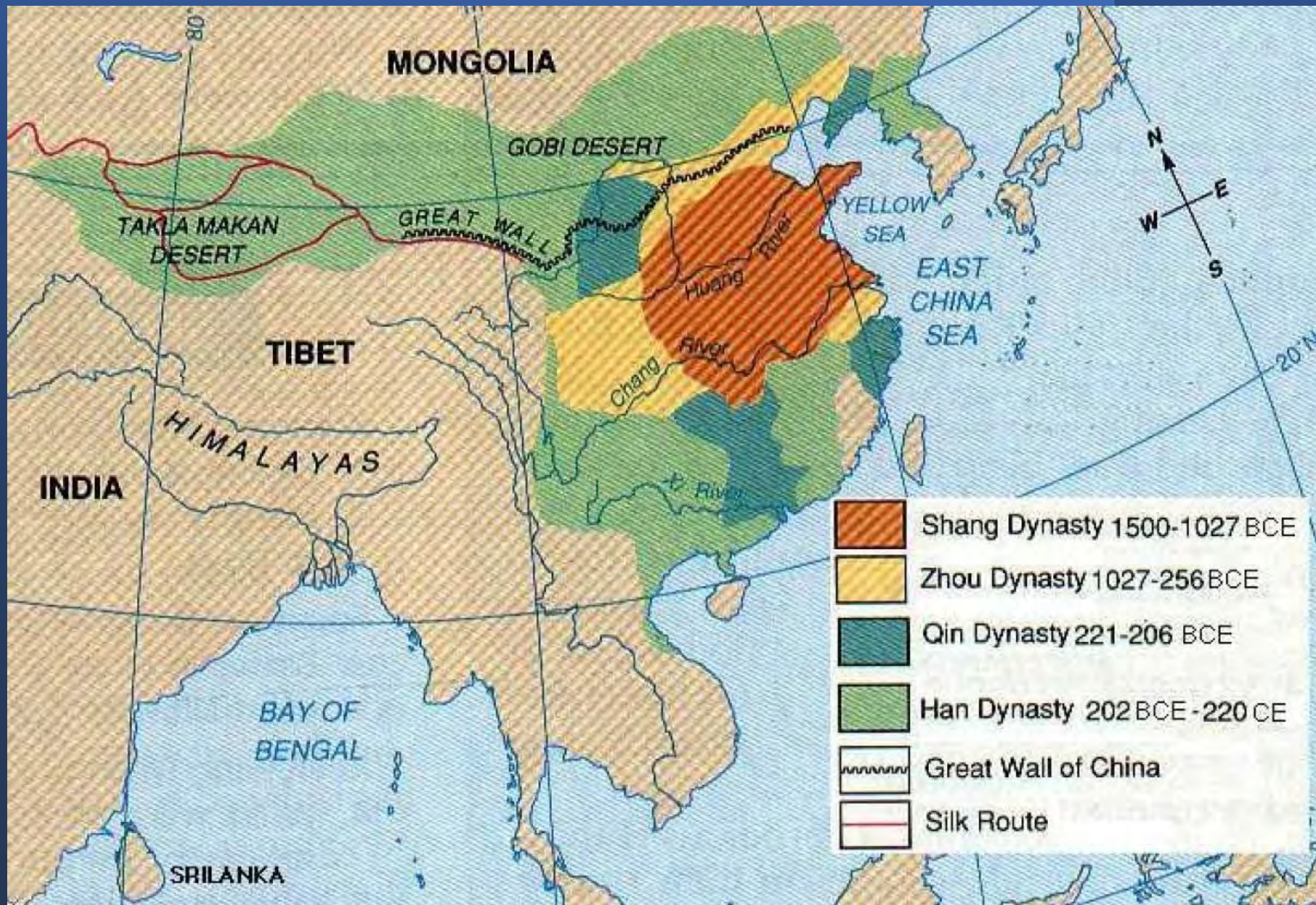
## Complex Government Requires Formalized Learning



- Emperor Wu established the Confucian curriculum in 136 BCE, The imperial university in the capital began to produce an ever-increasing number of graduates qualified for official service
- The number exceeded 10,000 each year by the beginning of the Eastern Han.
- Specialists screened candidates for public office, based upon merit, including core texts from Confucian Schools of thought
- Han Empire was the most intensively governed area on the surface of the earth in the centuries before the Christian era.



**China, Wang Mang Interregnum, AD 9-23,  
bronze cash coin  
ANA # 1998.111.99**



**End of Formal Presentation**