

# Chinese Civilization: An Overview

# Talking Points

- Impressions: What do you have in mind we say Chinese Civilization (contributions, legacy etc)

# Preview

Shang Dynasty, c. 1700 BC-1000 BC

Chou/Zhou dynasty c. 1100-400 BC-development of Philosophy, Confucianism & Taoism

Qin/Chin, c.221-207 BC

Han, c.207-220 CE

Tang, c.618-907 CE

Ming Dynasty

Manchu?

# Introduction

- Where the English word China comes from?
- The most commonly accepted theory the English word "China" is that they came from the "Qin" (Chin)
- Qin(Chin) dynasty was short-lived and was often regarded as overly tyrannical
- it unified the written language in China and gave the supreme ruler of China the title of "Emperor".

- **During the Shang & Chou periods, the Chinese made remarkable achievements in astronomy and bronzework, learned to make silk and create books, and developed a complex system of writing.**

- The first dynasty according to Chinese historical sources was the Xia dynasty
- however there is no archaeological evidence definitively attesting a Xia dynasty

# Centrality of Geography

The central valley of the Yellow River was the cradle of the Chinese civ.-cradle of Chinese civ

Another important one was the Yangtze.

Much tamer than the Yellow River- by 5<sup>th</sup> century CE-a center of China's rice production

Eventually, the rice of Yangtze became more important than wheat of YR

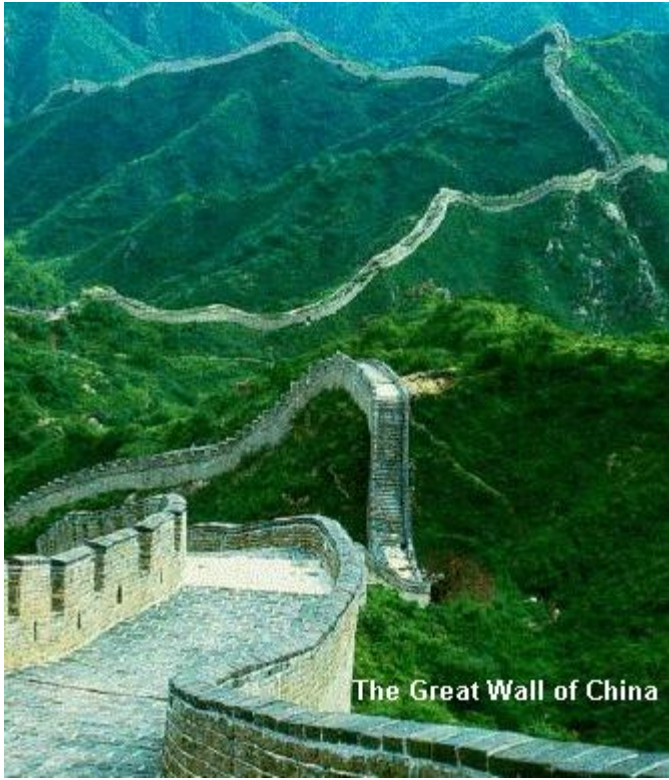
- **Long distances and physical barriers isolated China from other ancient civilizations**
- **leading the Chinese to believe that China was the center of the Earth and the sole source of civilization.**
- **Of all civilizations, China was the most isolated**

- The location of the first Chinese civ. (the Shang D)- Yellow River Valley
- Semi-civilized villages
- Conquered by the Shang who took over the area that was already on way to a civilized life
- Villagers produced advanced stone tools & bronze weapons
- Agriculture-wheat

- Life was not easy as the YR's flood was tremendously damaging & raging
- It had to be controlled by extensive levee
- Our knowledge primarily through archeology (1920s), not writings –Shang produced little writings
- Silkworm was already being cultivated-exp to India

# Levee

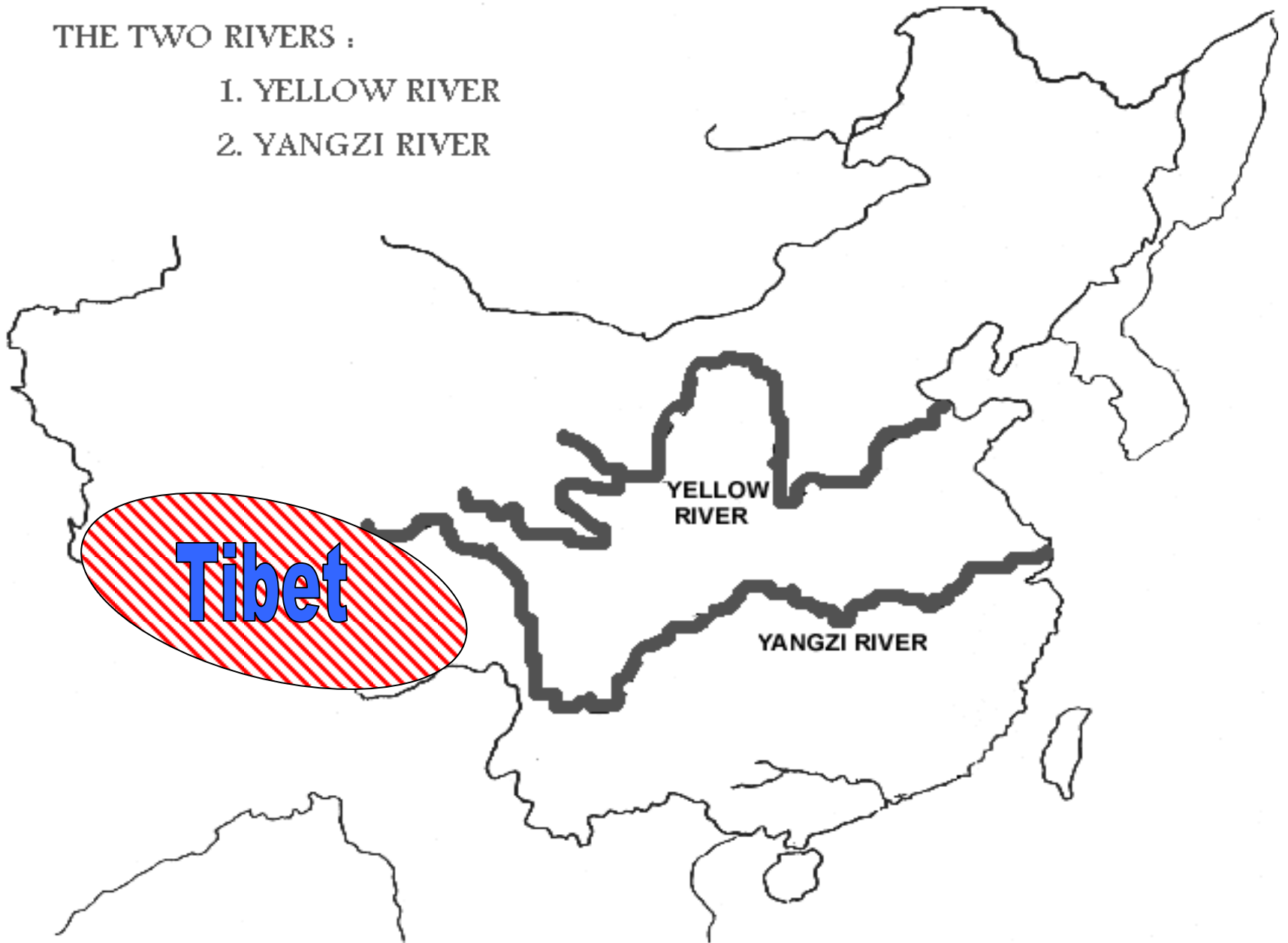




The Great Wall of China

THE TWO RIVERS :

1. YELLOW RIVER
2. YANGZI RIVER



**Tibet**

YELLOW RIVER

YANGZI RIVER

Yellow River - The Yellow River, or Huang He, received its name due to loess. It was nicknamed the "River of Sorrows" because it often flooded and destroyed crops



Yangzi River - The Yangzi River Valley, along with the Yellow River Valley, supported the first people of the early Chinese civilization.



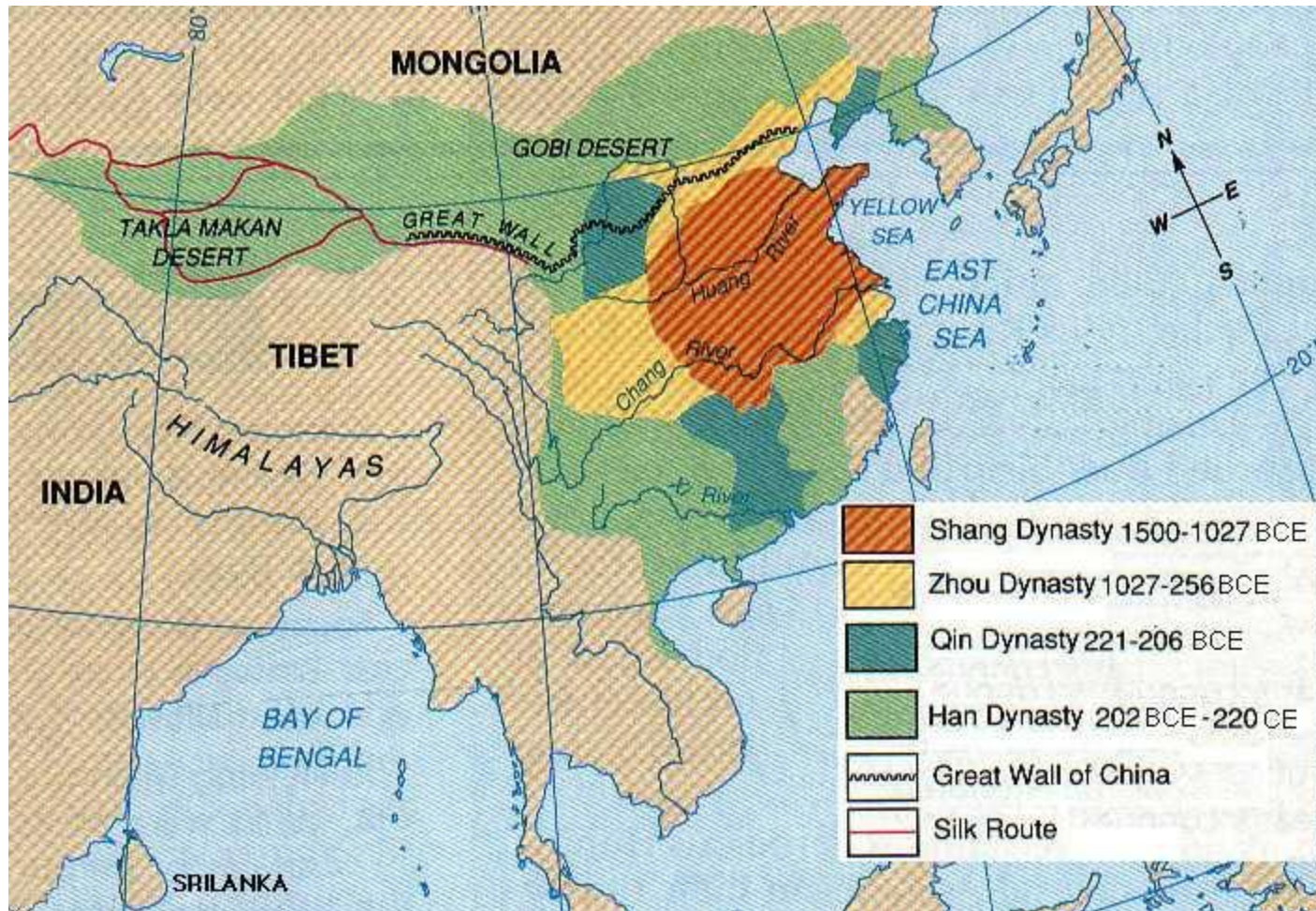
# Shang Dynasty 91523-1027 BC)

- Shang rule over the Xia state was lacking/fragile
- Their rule endured mainly –strength of their army-armed with powerful composite bows & chariot-riding archers
- Shang's Justification of its power: their dynasty possessed exclusive spiritual power to communicate with the Lord of heaven- so to acquire divine assistance to promote welfare through Shang kings—that's Shang

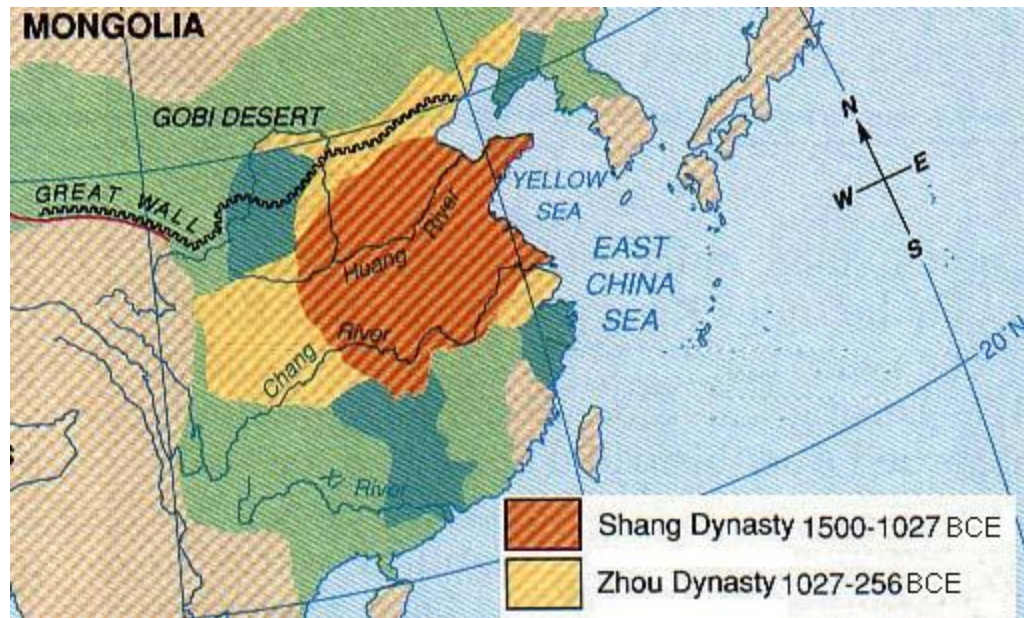
# From Shang to C/Zhou

- The Shang were in turn invaded by the Zhou (1027 to 221 centuries BC)
- Ruled about 900 yrs, Shang confined to n/central
- Chou greatly extended its borders
- Division: 1<sup>st</sup> phase -1100-750 Unified Empire
- 750-400-Latter Period-provincial revolts until the central empire broke down
- centralized authority was slowly eroded by warlords ruling small states
- Eventually, many strong independent states, in continuous war, paid but nominal deference to the Zhou/Chou state as the Imperial centre

# Map of ancient Chinese empires



# Zhou empire of Ancient China





## Chou Period: Proliferation of Philosophy

- Chou period was an era of intellectual activity.
- The Chinese thinkers were more secular than religious in their outlook.
- Among the system of thoughts:
- Confucianism, Taoism and Legalism

# Ideas/Philosophy

- Chou's novelty-The Idea of Mandate of Heaven- to justify their overthrow of the Shang
- was a political-social philosophy that served as the basic Chinese explanation for the success and failure of monarchs and states
- Whenever a dynasty fell, the reason offered by China's sages was that it had lost the moral right to rule which is given by Heaven alone
- Most historians today agree that the theory the Mandate of Heaven was an invention of the Zhou to justify their overthrow of the Shang.
- The king, after all, was the father of his people, and paternal authority was the basic cement of Chinese society from earliest times.
- Rebellion against a father, therefore, needed extraordinary justification
- Later all new regimes, co-opted this mandate of Heaven

# Confucianism

- Confucius (551-479) appeared toward end Chou period
- Teachings compiled by his disciples in the Analects
- Focused on relations between individuals & especially b/w ruled & ruler
- Little inclination toward relation to God or afterlife
- Great model-family.
- State should be run like a family: father-head, each person-rights & duties

- Insisted on gentleman's conduct- courtesy to all, justice & moderation-the chief virtue
- Rich powerful should have obligation—poor & weak
- A gentleman was made not man
- Aristocrat not necessarily a gentleman, low-born person could be
- Education open to all
- Rulers should act like good fathers to his family

- Rulers should listen to counsel of his gentlemen advisors
- Such a ruler would maintain a mandate of heaven

# Three Schools of thought in China

- • Confucius, China's most influential philosopher, taught that harmony resulted when people accepted their place in society. Confucianism stressed the values of filial piety, loyalty to superiors and respect for inferiors, honesty, hard work, and concern for others.



# Taoism

- In the latter Chou period, Confucianism was challenged by Taoism & Legalism
- Philosophy centered on following the way of nature
- Founder-Lao Zi (Lao-tzu)
- The best government as the least government
- In governing should follow the way of nature-through meditation & observation
- Ruler's resp-to give people justice & good administration as ppl could not self-govern
- All extremes to be avoided.
- Good rulers do little

# Conf, Taoist & Legalist Theories of the Best Rulers

- Chinese rulers , which based their government on the Confucian model, stressed that the best ruler was a virtuous man who led by example.
- Legalists stressed strength, not goodness, as a ruler's greatest virtue, while Daoists, who rejected the everyday world, believed that the best government was the one that governed least.

# Legalism

- Devised by a prince Han Feizi (d.233 BC)
- Based on theory that humans are ess. Evil, he tried to control them through 3 means:
  - 1.strict use of uniformly punitive laws
  - 2.Group responsibility
  - Rewards & punishments system
- Feizi recommended that rulers create a powerful absolutist state

Enthusiastically received by the Chin dynasty

- Chin- Legalism
- The Han dynasty that replaced the Chin, adopted Confucianism as the official state philosophy, as did most other successive dynasties

# Unification of Overview from

- The last years of Chou- warring feudal lords & eventual collapse.
- By 500 BC, effective central govt nonexistence- era of the Warring States, 500-220 BC
- China was unified under one emperor in 221 BC by Qin Shi Huangdi, ushering in the Qin Dynasty, the first unified centralized Chinese state.
- After the fall of authoritarian Qin Dynasty in 207 BC came the Han Dynasty which lasted until 220 CE. A period of disunion followed again