

The Qin Dynasty and the First Emperor

Continuities and Changes



Qin Shihuang, The First Emperor

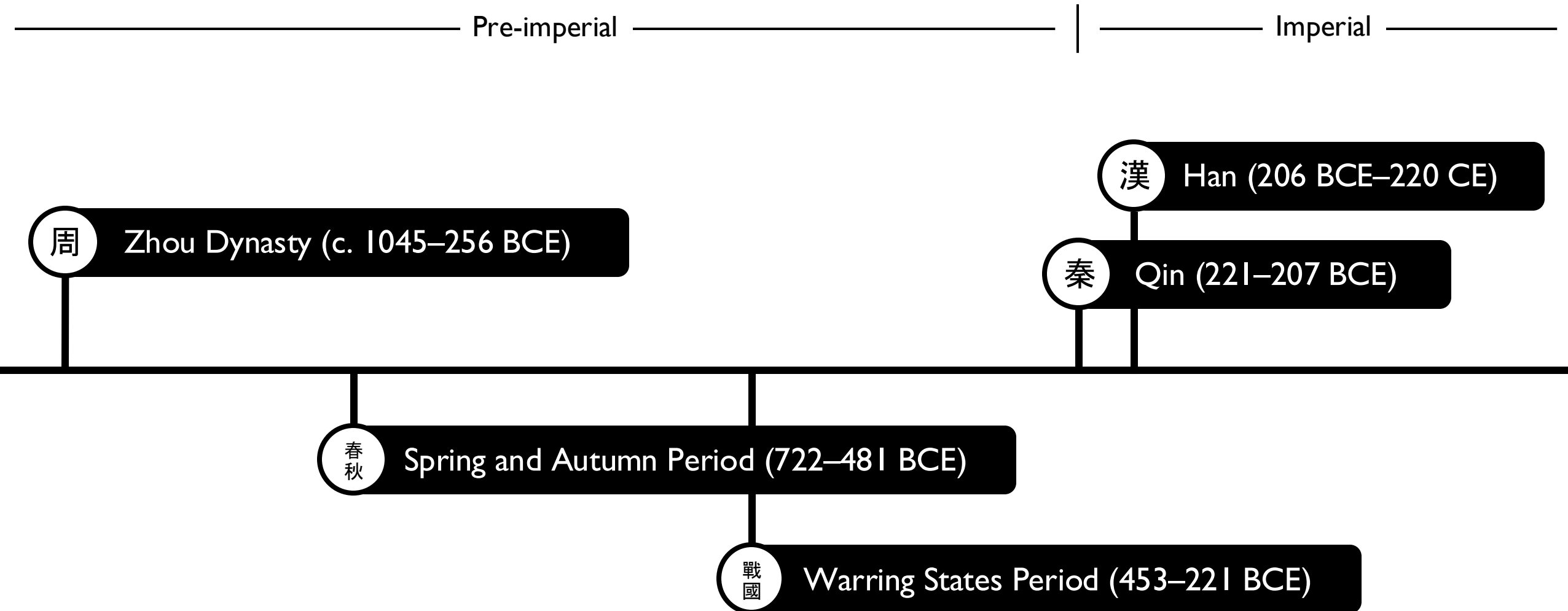


Source: Li Feng, *Early China: A Social and Cultural History* (2014)

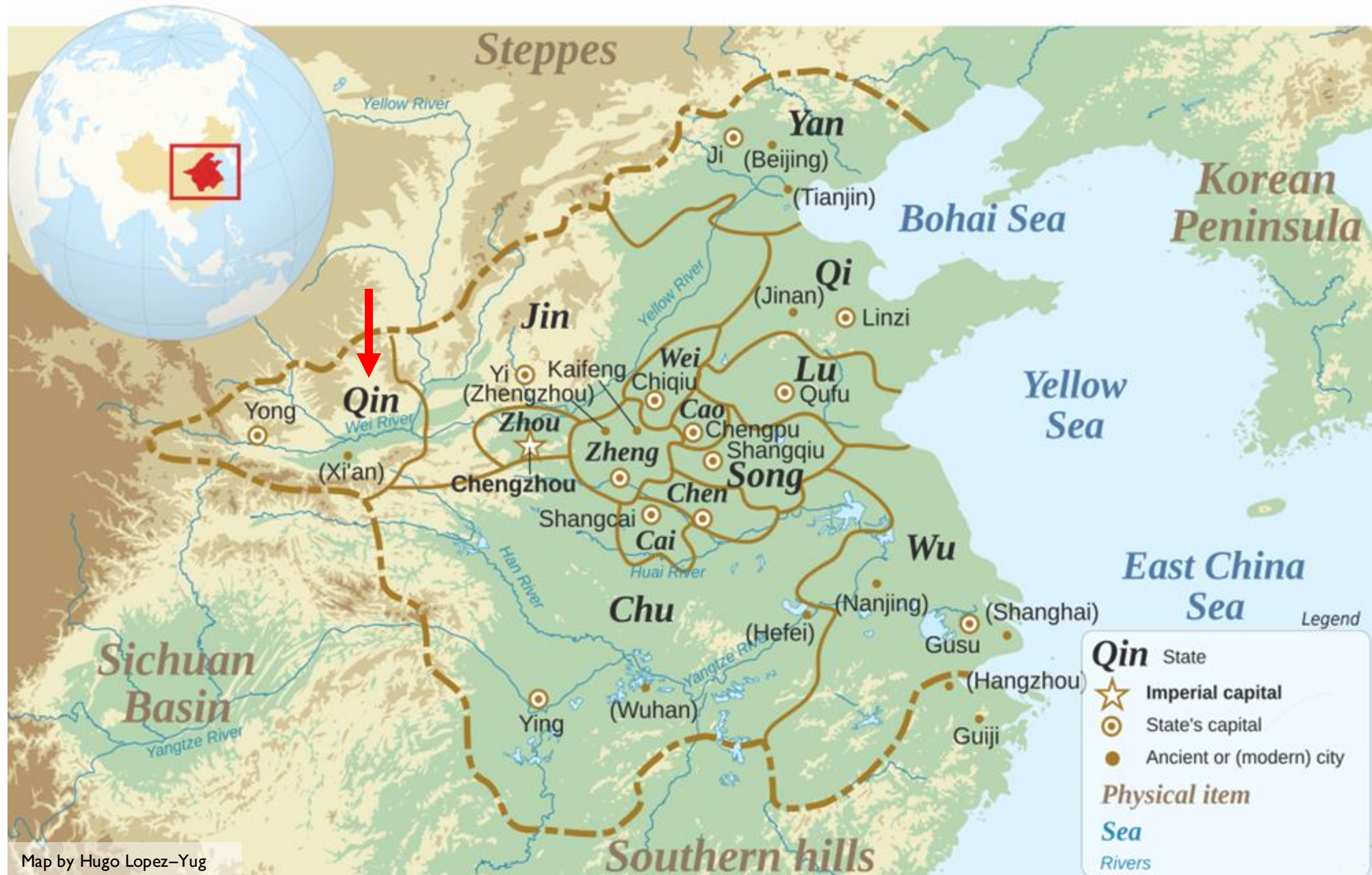


r. 247/221–210 BCE

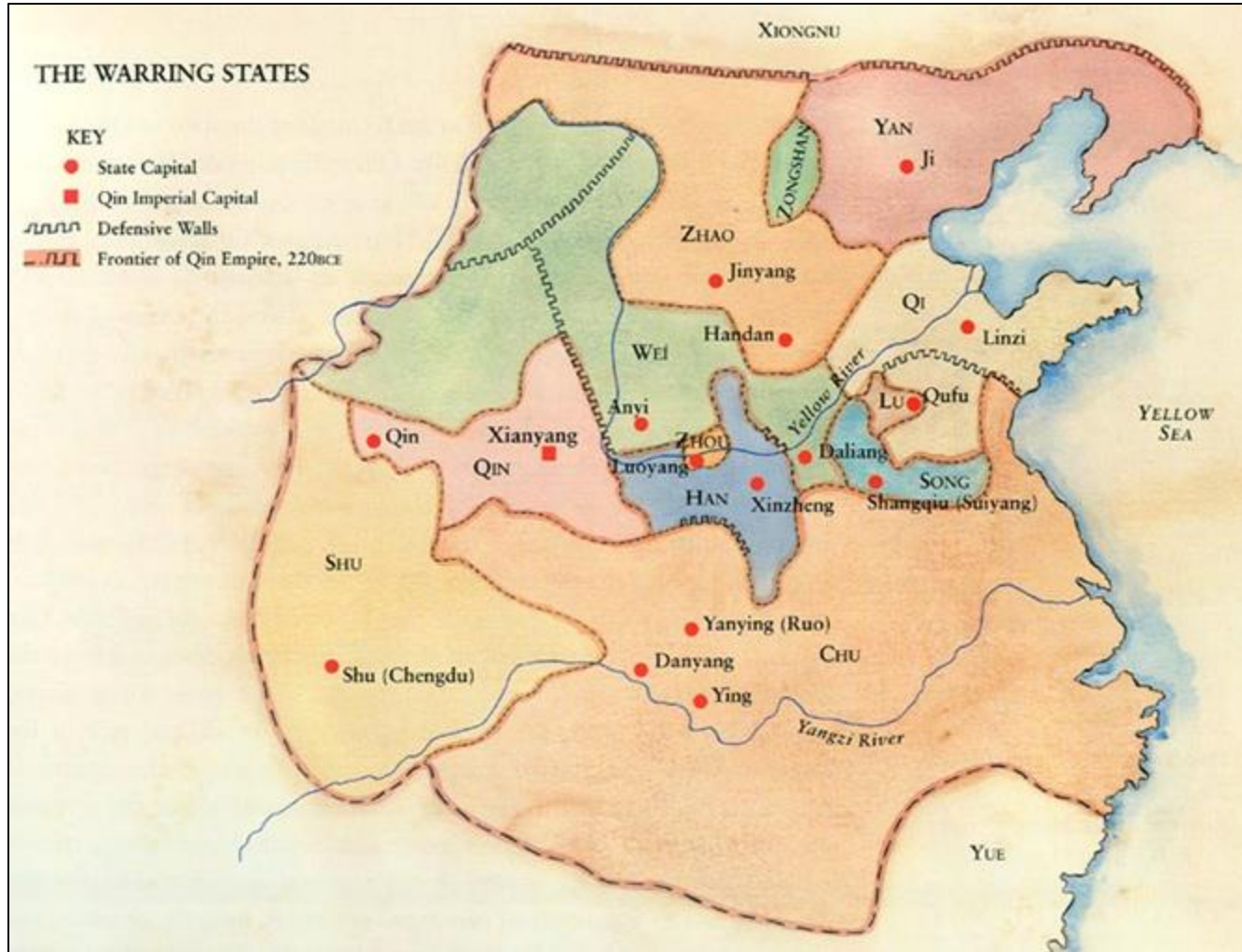
Timeline of First Millennium BCE China



Chinese plain in the late Spring and Autumn period (5th century BC)



Qin Wars of Unification

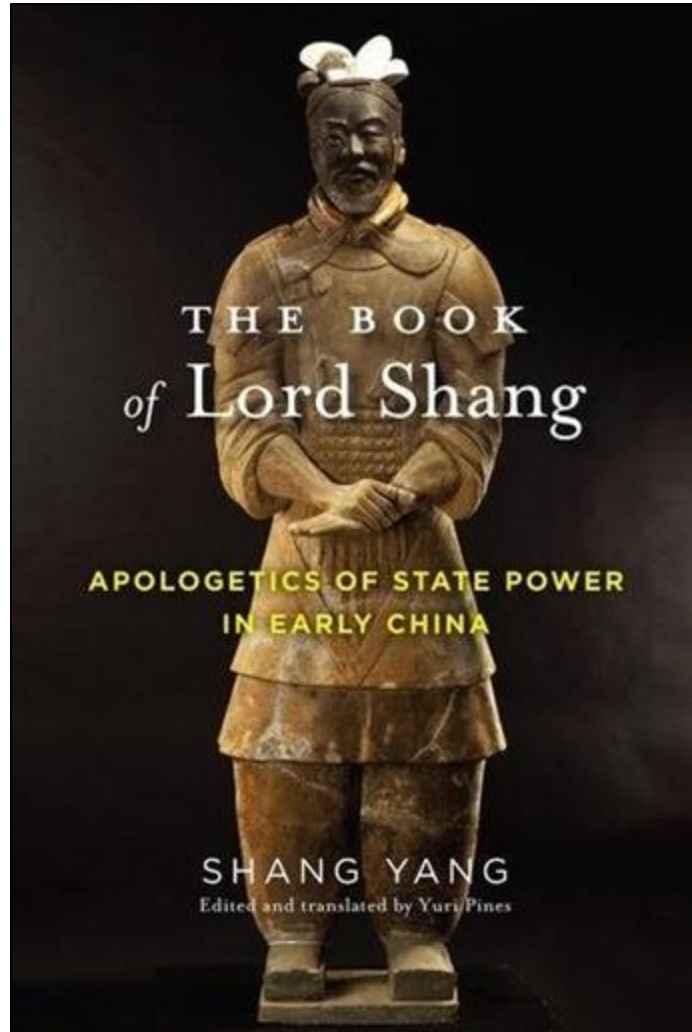


Battle of Changping, 260 BCE

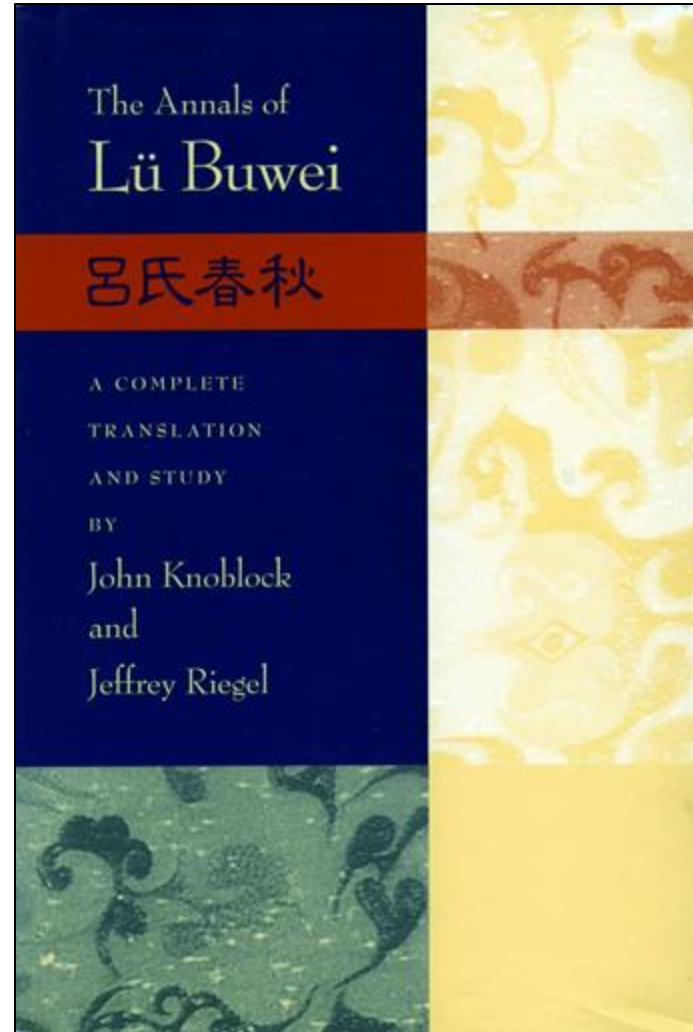


Mass burial pit
Gaoping, Shanxi Province

Qin Statesmen



Shang Yang (390–338 BCE)



Lü Buwei (291–235 BCE)



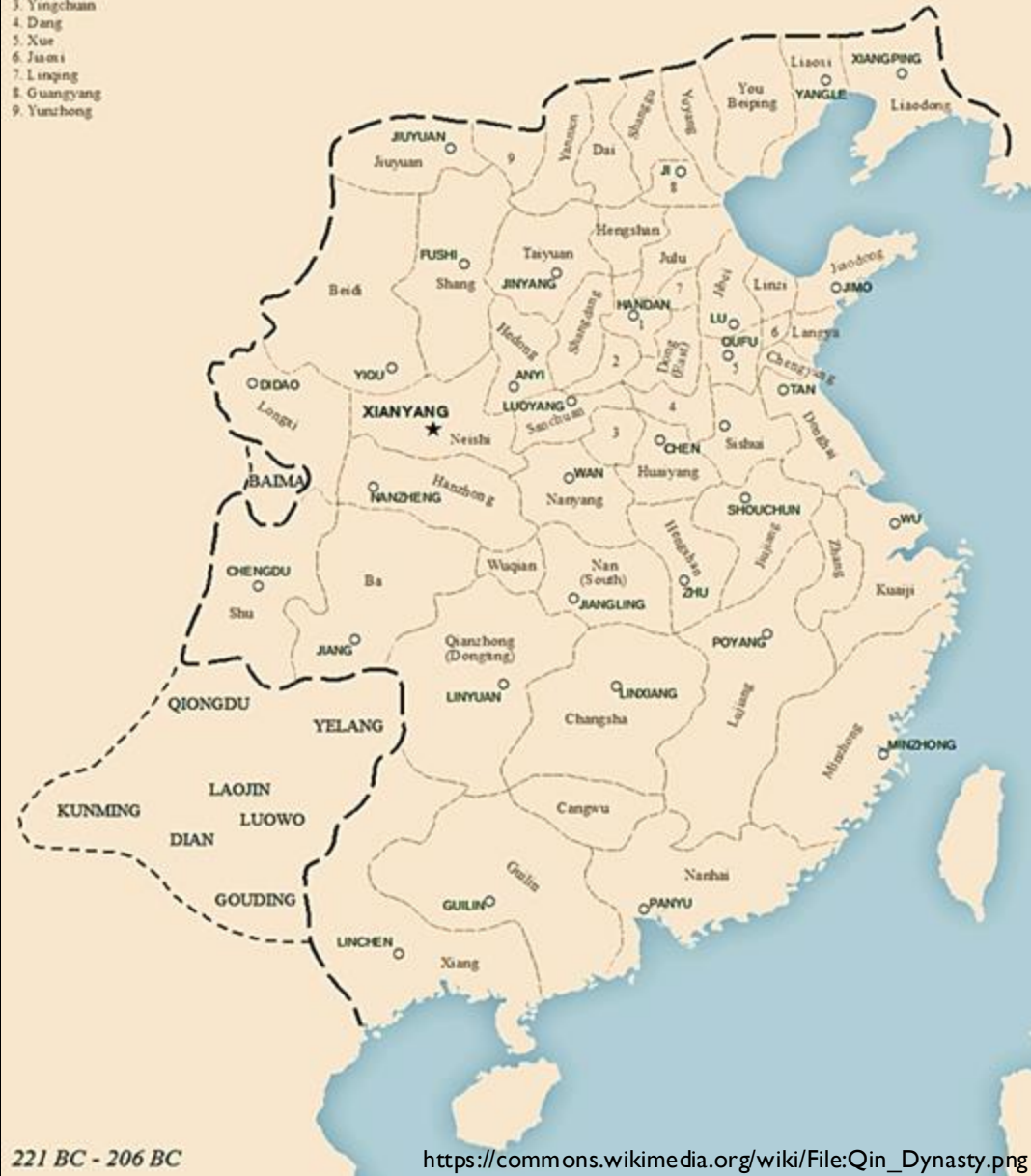
Li Si (280–208 BCE)

Major Reforms and Developments

1. Territorial Reorganization
2. Reordering Society
3. Bureaucracy
4. Legal System
5. Standardizing Measures, Currency, Script
6. Monumental Construction Works

Commanderies (Prefectures, the Jun) of Qin Dynasty

1. Handan
2. Henei
3. Yingchuan
4. Dang
5. Xue
6. Jiamen
7. Lingling
8. Guangyang
9. Yunzhong



QIN EMPIRE 210 BCE

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Reorganizing Society

Column 1: 南陽戶人荊不更黃得
Nanyang, household head, fourth merit rank in Jing, Huang De

Column 2: 妻曰嚟
Wife, called Qian

Column 3: 子小上造台
Child, minor second merit rank, Tai
子小上造
Child, minor second merit rank
子小上造定(?)
Child, minor second merit rank Ding (?)

Column 4: 子小女庠
Child, minor female, Hu
子小女移
Child, minor female, Yi
子小女平(?)
Child, minor female Ping(?)

Column 5: 伍長
Squad leader [Intact slip]

Household registry from Qianling County, Dongting Commandery

Source: Hsing I-tien, "Qin-Han Census and Tax and Corvée Administration: Notes on Newly Discovered Materials," in *Birth of an Empire: The State of Qin Revisited* (2014)



Source: Hunan Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, *Liye Qin jian*, vol. 3 (2024)

Bureaucracy and Record-keeping

Table 1: Important events of Xi's life as seen in the *Chronicle*³⁹

<i>Date</i> ⁴⁰	<i>Important events of Xi's life</i>	<i>Age</i> ⁴¹
Jan. 14, 262 BCE	Was born (生)	1
246 BCE	Was enrolled for service (傅)	17
Sept. 5-Oct. 3, 244 BCE	Was advanced to be a scribe (掾史)	19
Dec. 3-31, 244 BCE	Became [District?] Scribe of Anlu county (安陸□ ⁴² 史)	20
May 6-Jun. 4, 241 BCE	Became Scribe Director of Anlu county (安陸令史)	22
Feb. 7, 240 BCE	Became Scribe Director of Yan county (鄢令史)	23
May 11, 235 BCE	Prosecuted legal cases in Yan county (治獄鄢)	28
234 BCE	Joined the army (從軍)	29
232 BCE	Joined the army at Pingyang (從平陽軍)	31
231 BCE	Self-reported age (自占年)	32
226 BCE	[Became] Attaché [to the Governor of Nan commandery] (□ ⁴³ 屬)	37

Career path of the scribe Xi (Shuihudi tomb no. 11)

Legal System

Book of Lord Shang

“In applying punishments, light offenses should be punished heavily; if light offenses do not appear, heavy offenses will not come.”

Source: W. de Bary and I. Bloom, *Sources of Chinese Tradition* (1999);
https://afe.easia.columbia.edu/ps/cup/book_of_lord_shang.pdf

Shuihudi Legal Statute

“When five men commit robbery together and the amount stolen exceeds as little as one cash, they are punished with the amputation of the left foot and tattooing, and they are sentenced to terms at hard labor. If there is a group of fewer than five men and the stolen goods exceeds 660 cash, they are tattooed, their noses are cut off, and they are sentenced to terms at hard labor. If the amount is between 220 and 660, they are tattooed and sentenced to hard labor. If it is less than 220, they are banished.”

Source: R. Eno, “The Laws of Qin”;
<https://scholarworks.iu.edu/iuswrrest/api/core/bitstreams/eebc34ab-765c-417c-bb6e-723342f8705e/content>

Weights and Measures



Shanghai Museum



Shandong Provincial Museum

Inscribed Qin measures

Weights and Measures

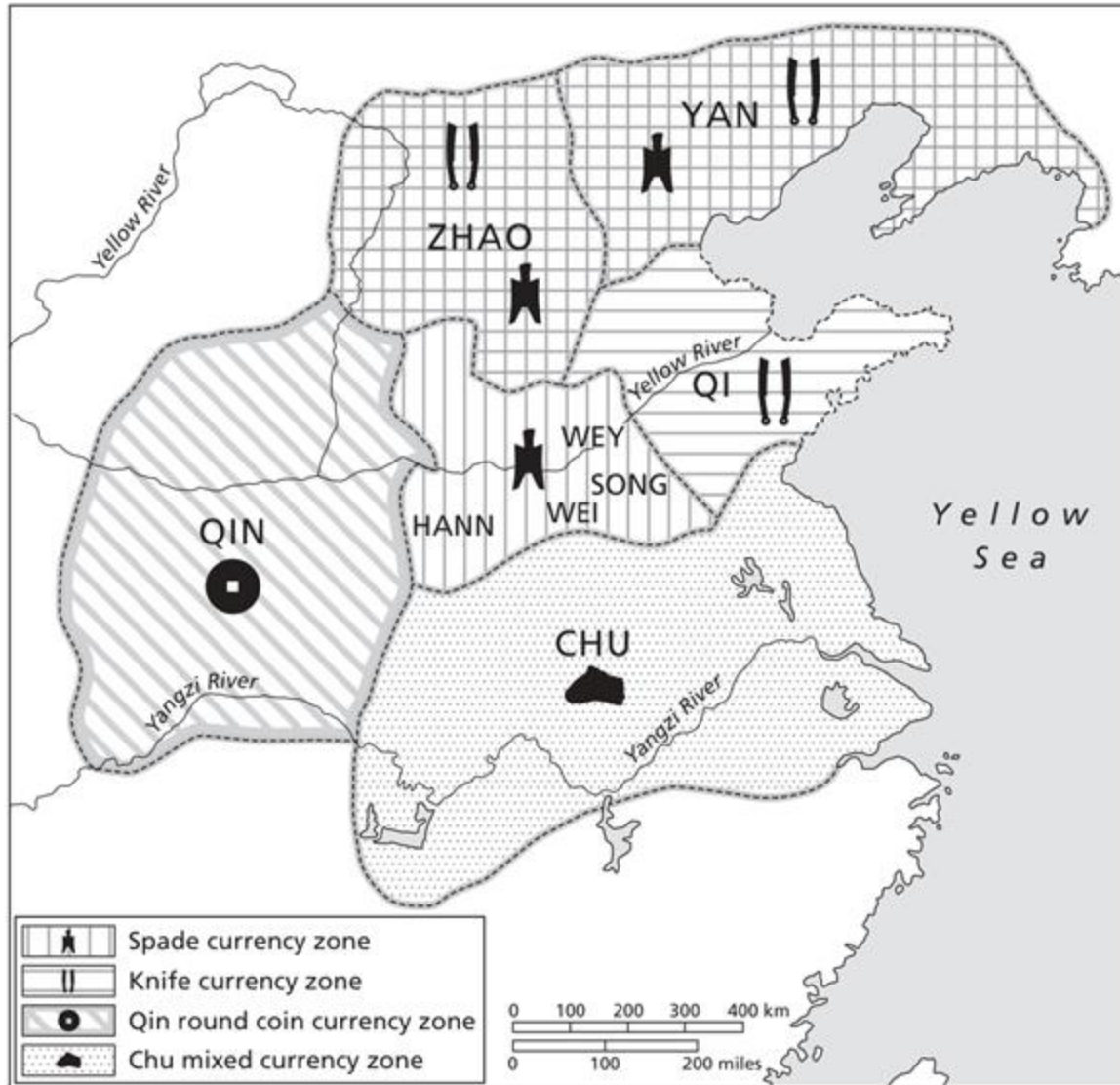


Shanghai Museum

“In the twenty-sixth year of his reign (221 BCE), the emperor unified the lords of the realm, the common people had great peace, and he established the title of emperor. Now he commands chancellors Wei Zhuang and Wang Wan: “As for the laws and units of measure that are disparate or doubtful, in all cases clarify and unify them.”

Source: C. Sanft, *Communication and Cooperation in Early Imperial China: Publicizing the Qin Dynasty* (2014)

Coins



Source: R. von Glahn, *The Economic History of China* (2016)



American Numismatic Society



China Numismatic Museum

Warring States knife coins (top),
spade coins (bottom)

Coins



American Numismatic Society



Shaanxi Provincial Institute of Archaeology/Metropolitan Museum of Art

Qin *banliang* (half *liang*) coin (top),
coin mold (bottom)

Shuihudi Legal Statute

“To make jackets for issuing as clothes:
For one large jacket eighteen catties of
hemp are used; value 60 cash. For one
medium jacket fourteen catties of hemp
are used; value 46 cash. For a small jacket
use eleven catties of hemp; value 36 cash.”

Source: A.F.P. Hulsewé, *Remnants of Ch'in Law* (1985)

Script

秦	秦	秦
黃	黃	黃
虎	虎	虎

From left to right: Qin, Chu, and modern
script variants for the characters
“Qin” (top), *huang* “august” (middle), and
hu “tiger” (bottom)



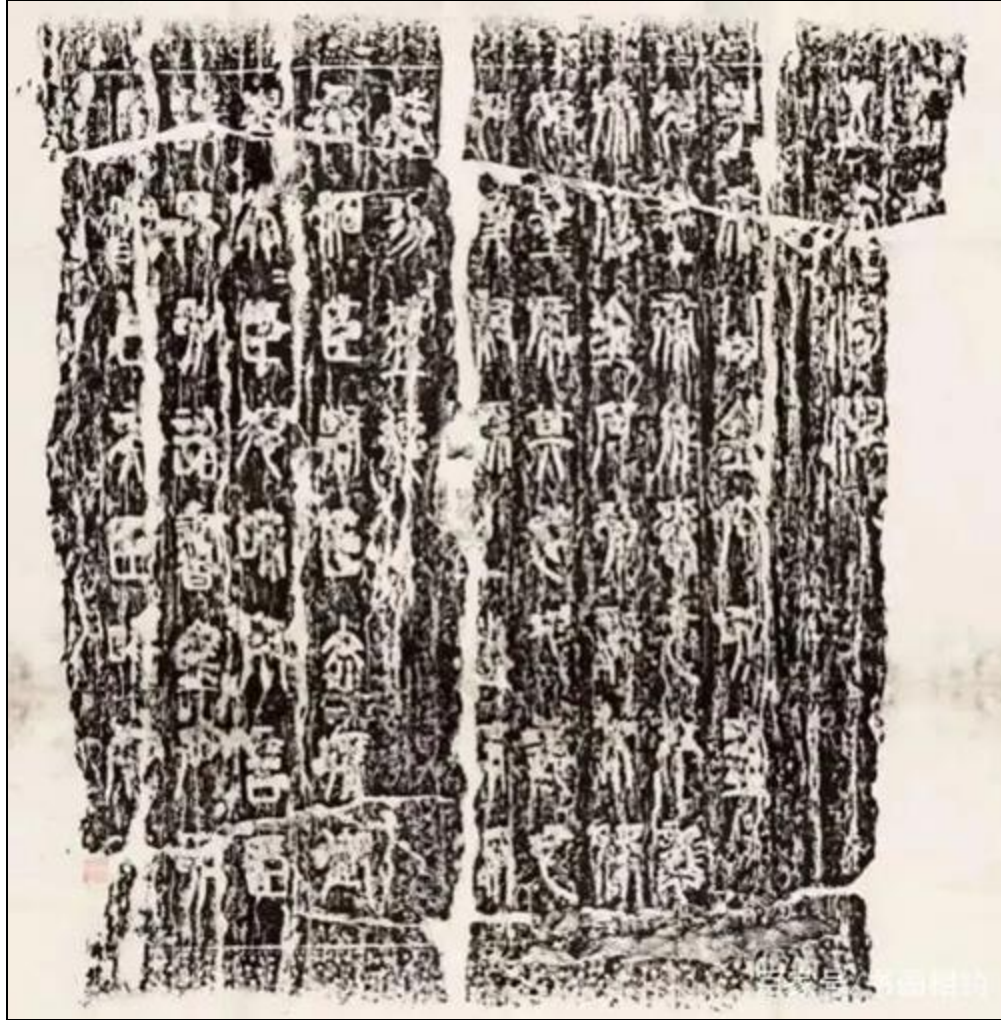
National Museum of China



Shaanxi History Museum

Qin tiger tallies

Script



“Everywhere under vast heaven
He (the First Emperor) unifies the minds and
integrates the wills.
Vessels and implements have their identical
measures,
One uniformly writes the refined characters.”

Source: M. Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch'in Shih-huang* (2000)

Rubbing of the Stele Inscription of the First Emperor on Mt. Langya



Memorial on the Burning of Books

“Your servant (Li Si) suggests that all books in the imperial archives, save for the memoirs of Qin, be burned ... After thirty days from the time of issuing the decree, those who have not destroyed their books are to be branded and sent to build the Great Wall.”

Source: W. de Bary and I. Bloom, *Sources of Chinese Tradition* (1999);
https://afe.easia.columbia.edu/ps/cup/lisi_legalist_memorials.pdf

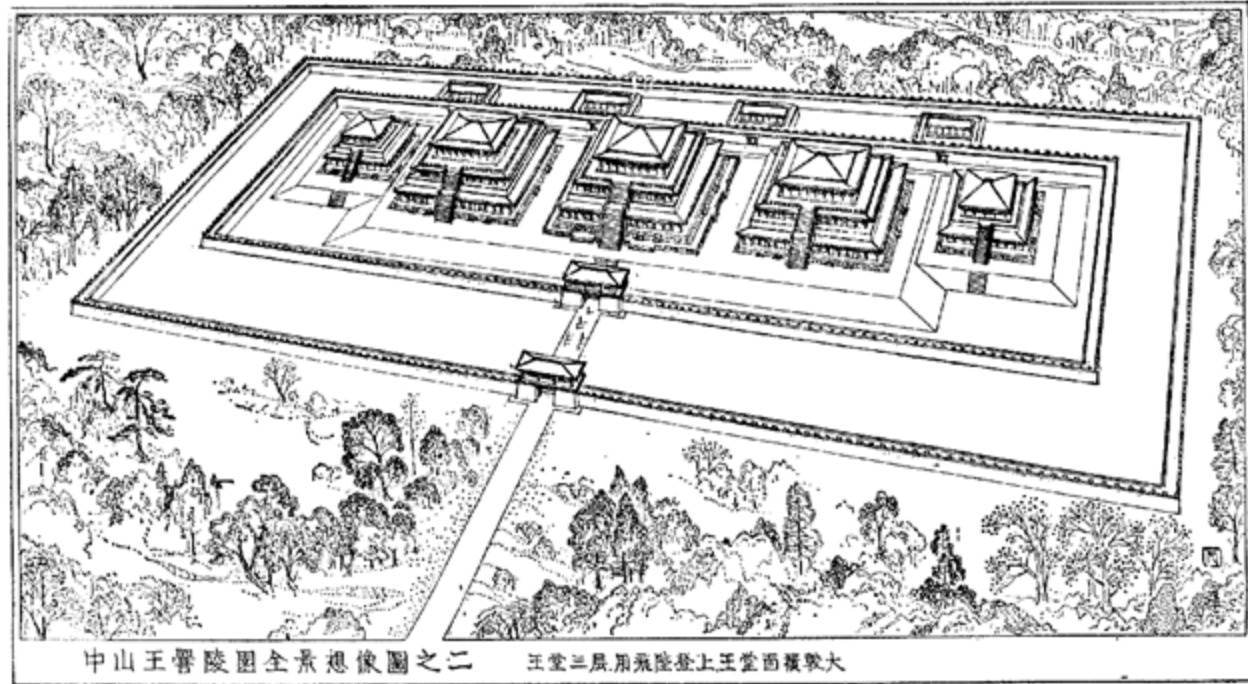
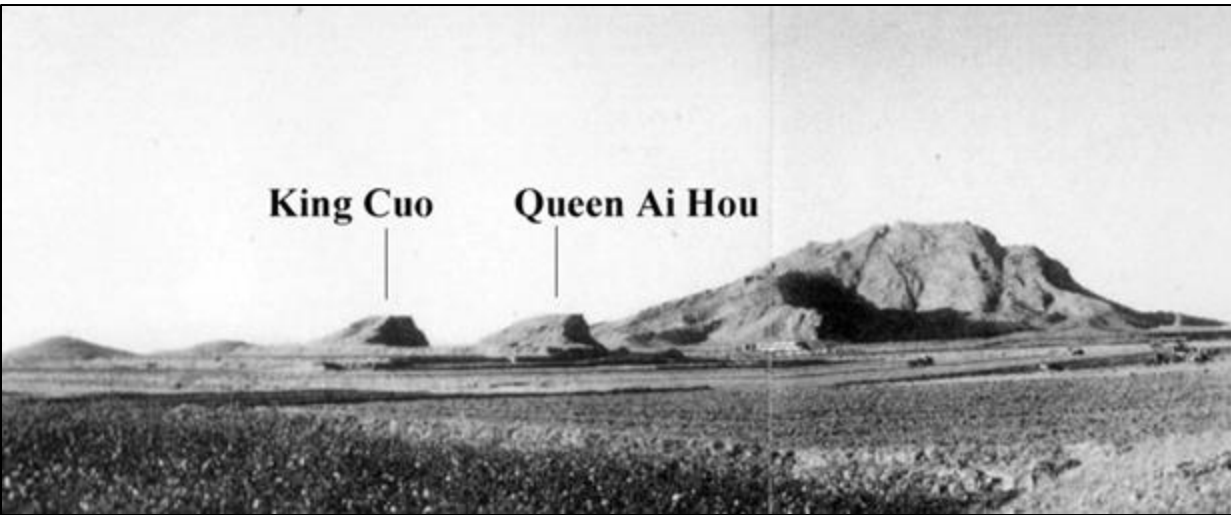
Depiction of the “Burning of Books and
Burying of Scholars,”
18th century Chinese painted album leaf

The First Emperor's Mausoleum



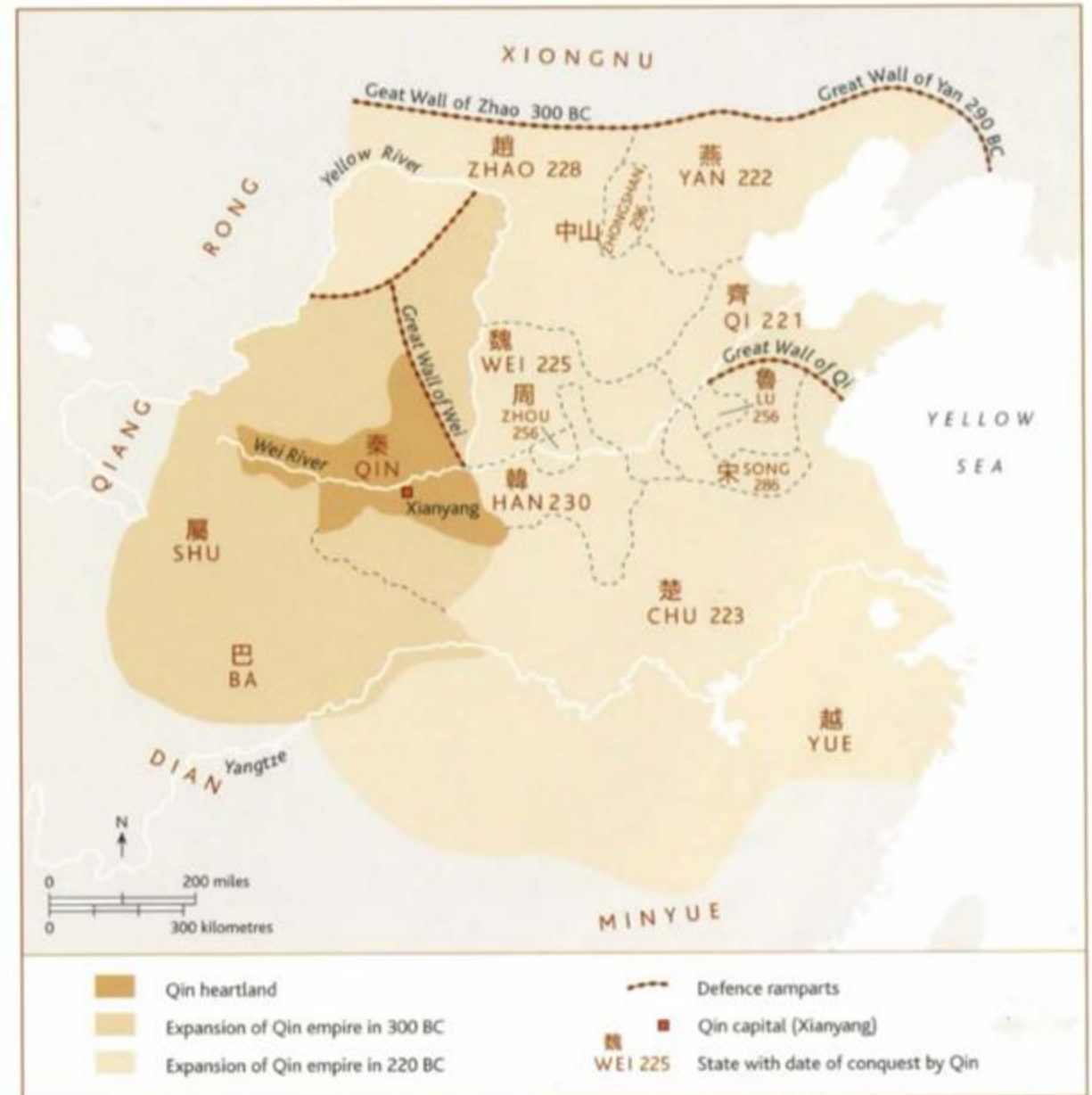
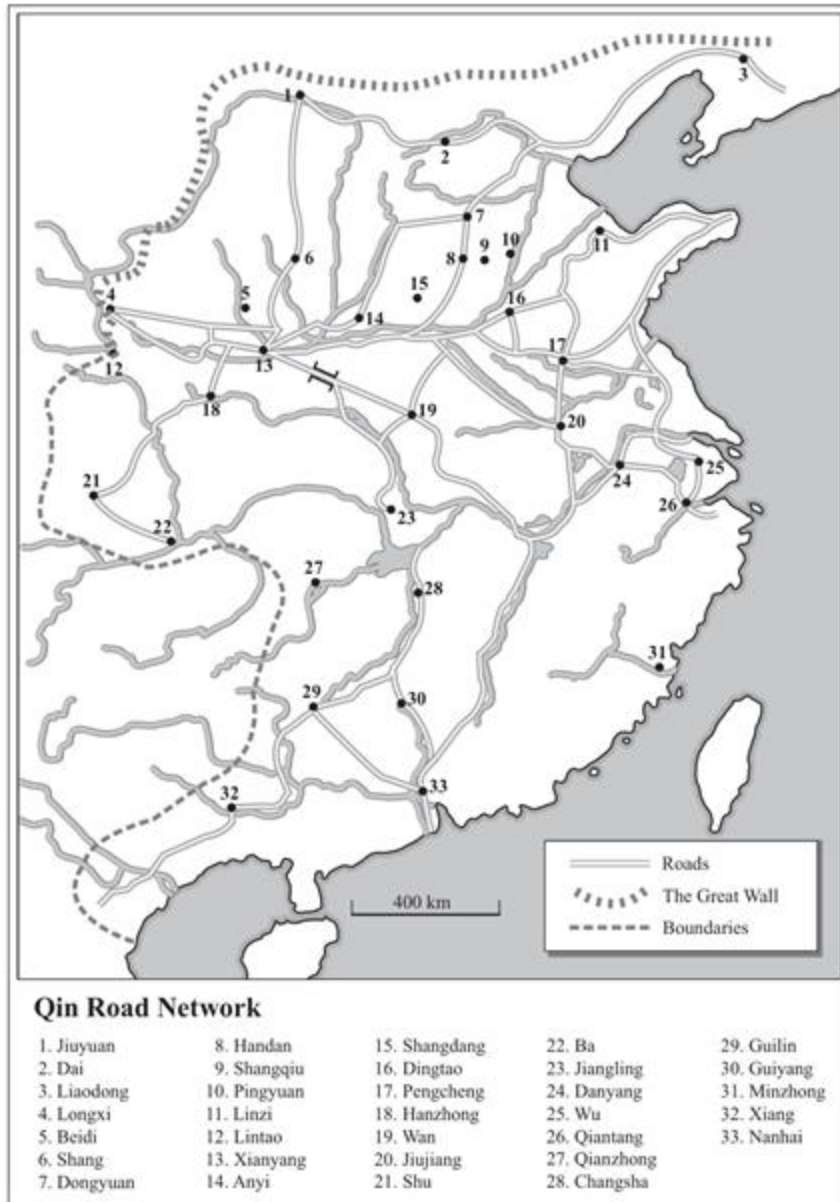


Mausoleum of King Cuo of Zhongshan (r. 327–313/10 BCE)



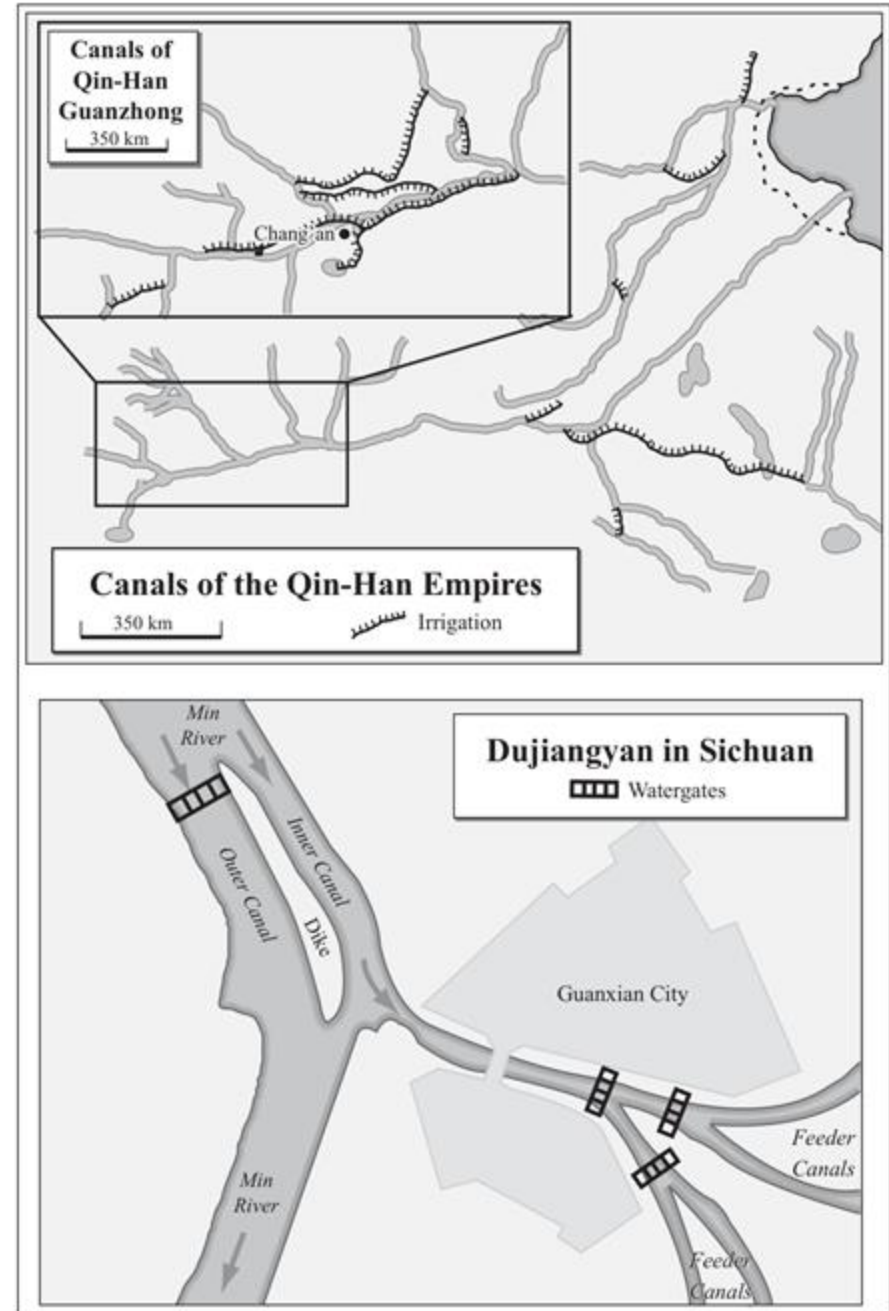
Source: X. Wu, *Material Culture, Power, and Identity in Ancient China* (2017)

Walls and Roads



Source: M. Lewis, *The Early Chinese Empires: Qin and Han* (2007)

Waterworks



Dujiangyan

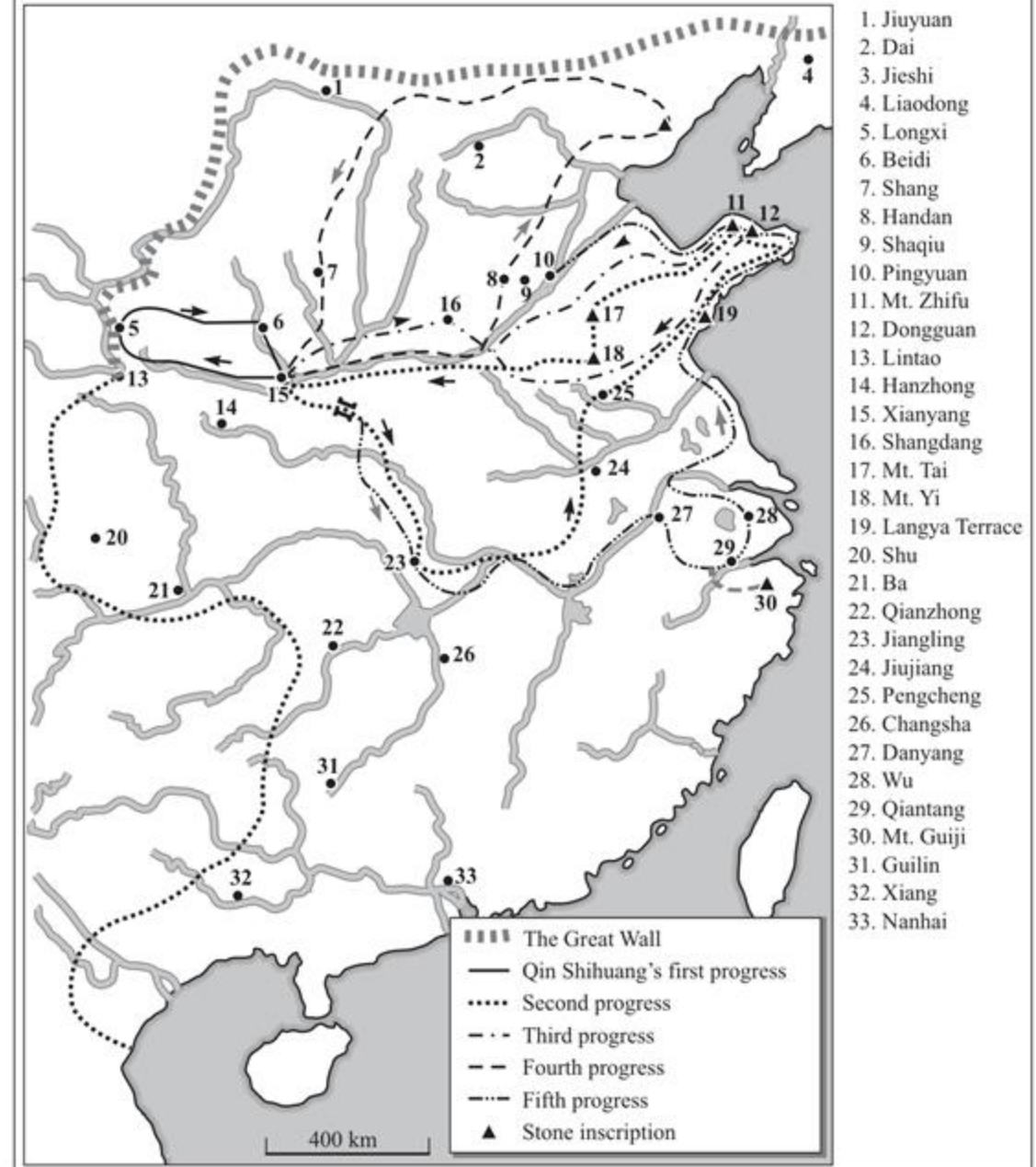


Fall



Edict of the Second Emperor of Qin

Qin Frontiers and Qin Shihuang's Imperial Progresses



Source: M. Lewis, *The Early Chinese Empires: Qin and Han* (2007)

Legacy



American Numismatic Society



Han dynasty *wuzhu* (five *zhu*) coin (top),
and terracotta soldiers (bottom)



Ming dynasty Great Wall