HKU03x Humanity and Nature in Chinese Thought

Week 1: Introduction: God, Nature and Dao
Section 7: Intro to ancient China: The classical period and geography

- Hundred Schools - classical period of Chinese philosophy
- Coincidence - Greek and Chinese classical periods coincide
    - Confucius with Parmenides/Heraclitus
    - Mozi with Socrates
    - Zhuangzi with Aristotle
    - Han Feizi with Epictetus, Pyrrho & Euclid
    - Both periods end with an imperial dynasty closing down the discussion
- Notice Buddha on the on the Western side of the timeline
    - Many are fascinated with the religious element of the overlap
    - Indian overlap could be explained by diffusion
    - Philosophy may have begun in the Ionian peninsula
    - The Phoenicians invented an alphabet which spread throughout the area
    - Evidence of movement of ideas, technologies and so on throughout the area
- The alphabet didn’t cross the Himalayas until after the Classical period
    - By this point, Chinese language, and culture were well established
    - Differences in language help explain differing philosophical developments
    - Geography is another explanation

- Geographical similarities
    - Sumerian and Chinese civilizations began independently in river valleys:
    - Both civilizations have flood myths
        - Chinese flood myth involves Sage kings “taming’ 3 flooded rivers (Yellow, Huai, Yangzi)
        - The irrigation achievements made the area between the rivers a fertile ground for large, agricultural civilization
- Greeks were seafaring traders, used the sky for navigation
    - Fueled the focus on geometry
- Sky also important in China, for agricultural reasons
    - Timing harvests, anticipating and controlling floods
- Both civilizations viewed themselves as centre of world