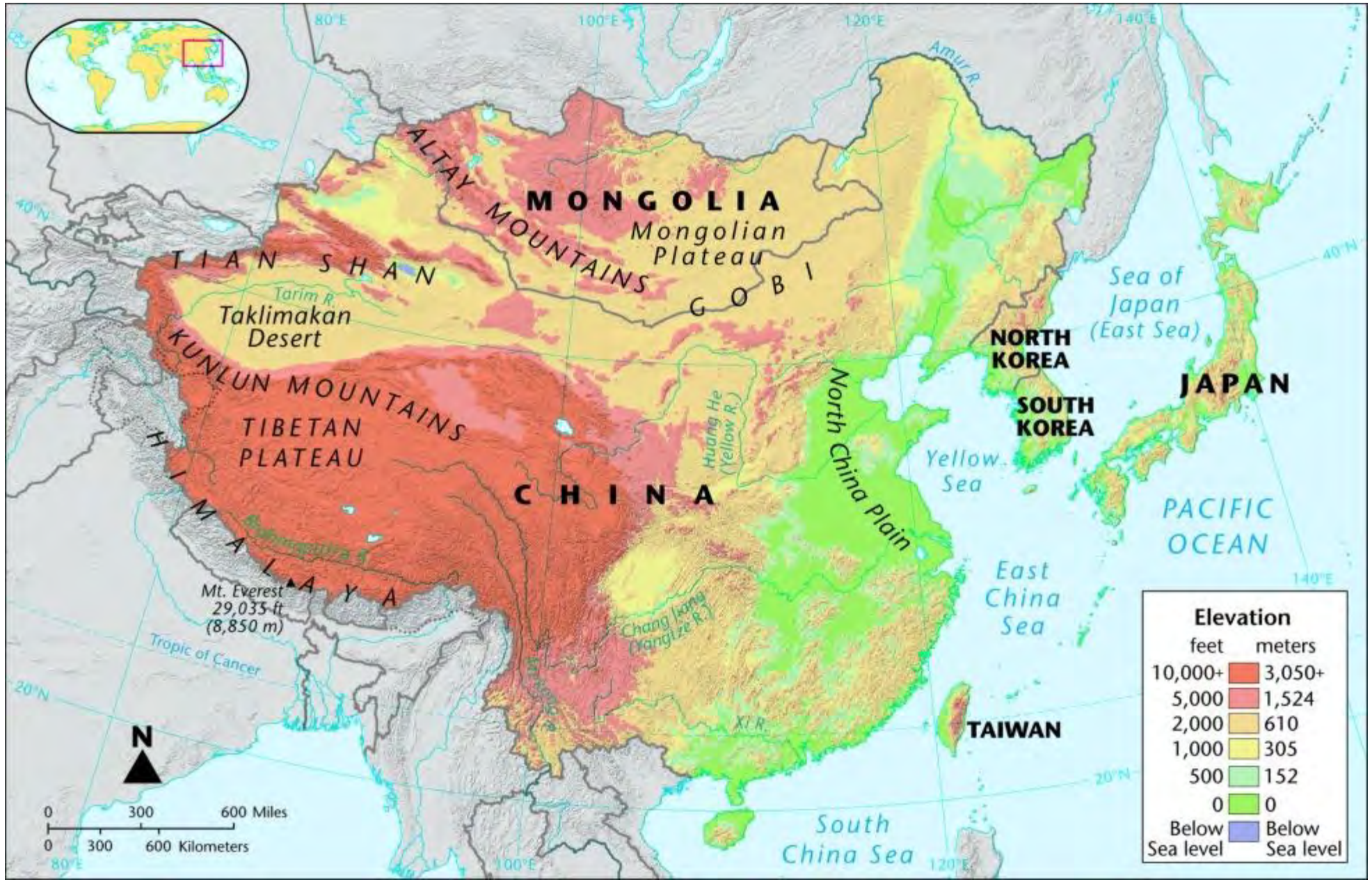
China, from Earliest Times through 20thC

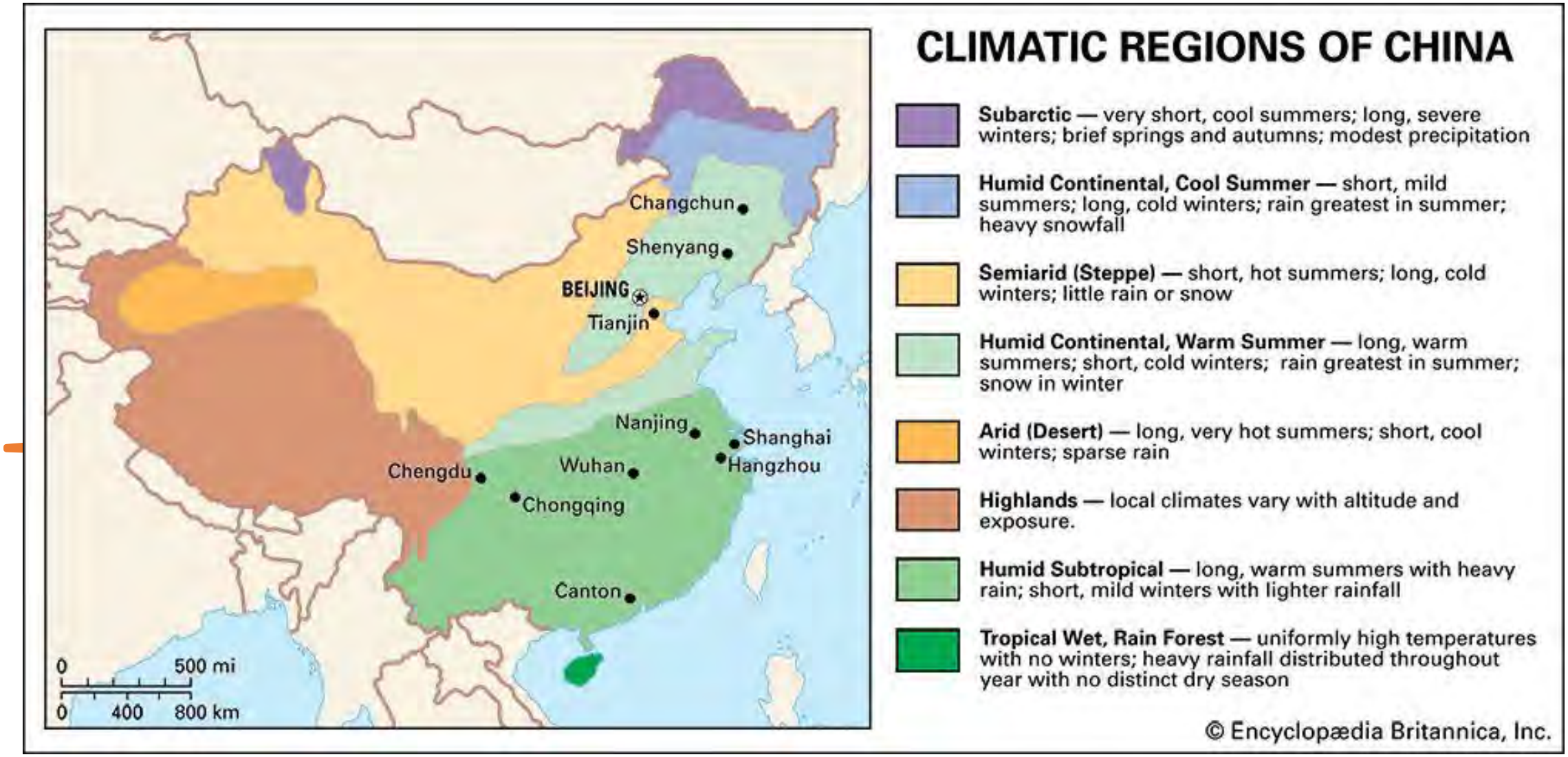
Fall 2025 Marist CLS

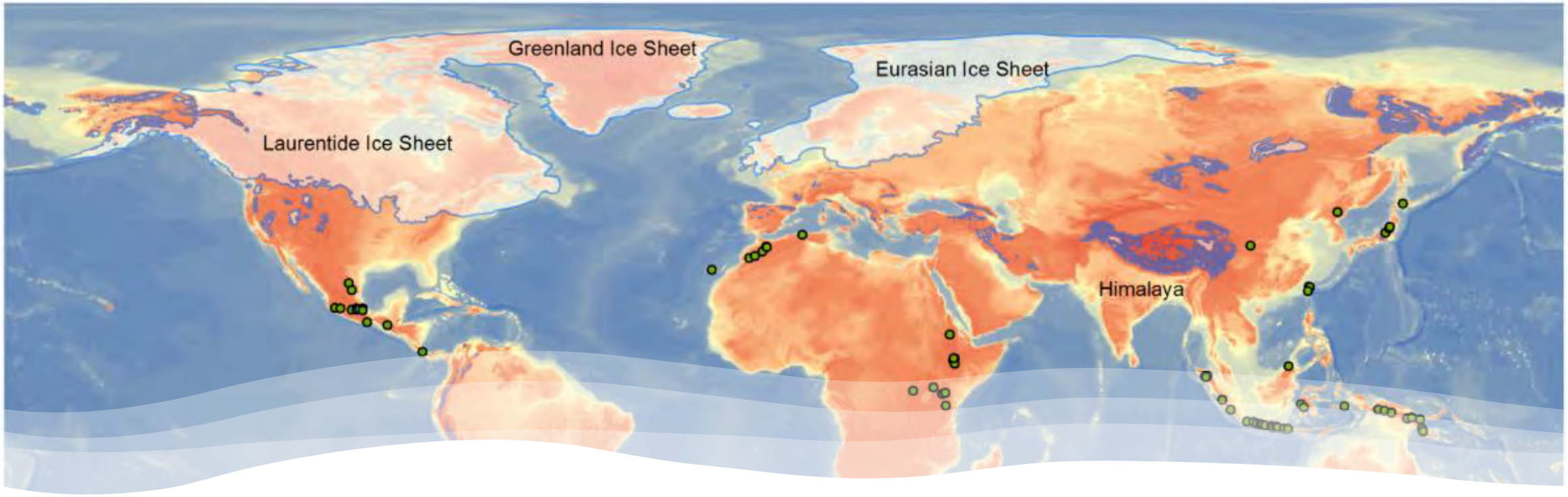
Class One

China Recognizes Fifty-Six Nationalities


MONGOLIA
Mongolian Plateau
ALTAY MOUNTAINS
TIAN SHAN
GOBI
Tarim R.
Taklimakan Desert
KUNLUN MOUNTAINS
TIBETAN PLATEAU
HIMALAYA
Mt. Everest 29,035 ft (8,850 m)
CHINA
Huang He (Yellow R.)
North China Plain
Chang Jiang (Yangtze R.)
Xi R.
Amur R.
NORTH KOREA
SOUTH KOREA
JAPAN
Sea of Japan (East Sea)
Yellow Sea
East China Sea
South China Sea
PACIFIC OCEAN
TAIWAN
Tropic of Cancer
80°E
100°E
120°E
140°E
40°N
20°N
N
0 300 600 Miles
0 300 600 Kilometers
Elevation
feet meters
10,000+ 3,050+
5,000 1,524
2,000 610
1,000 305
500 152
0 0
Below Sea level
Below Sea level

Climate of Modern China





Last Glacial Maximum:
Between 26,500 and 19,500 BP (meaning Before Present)

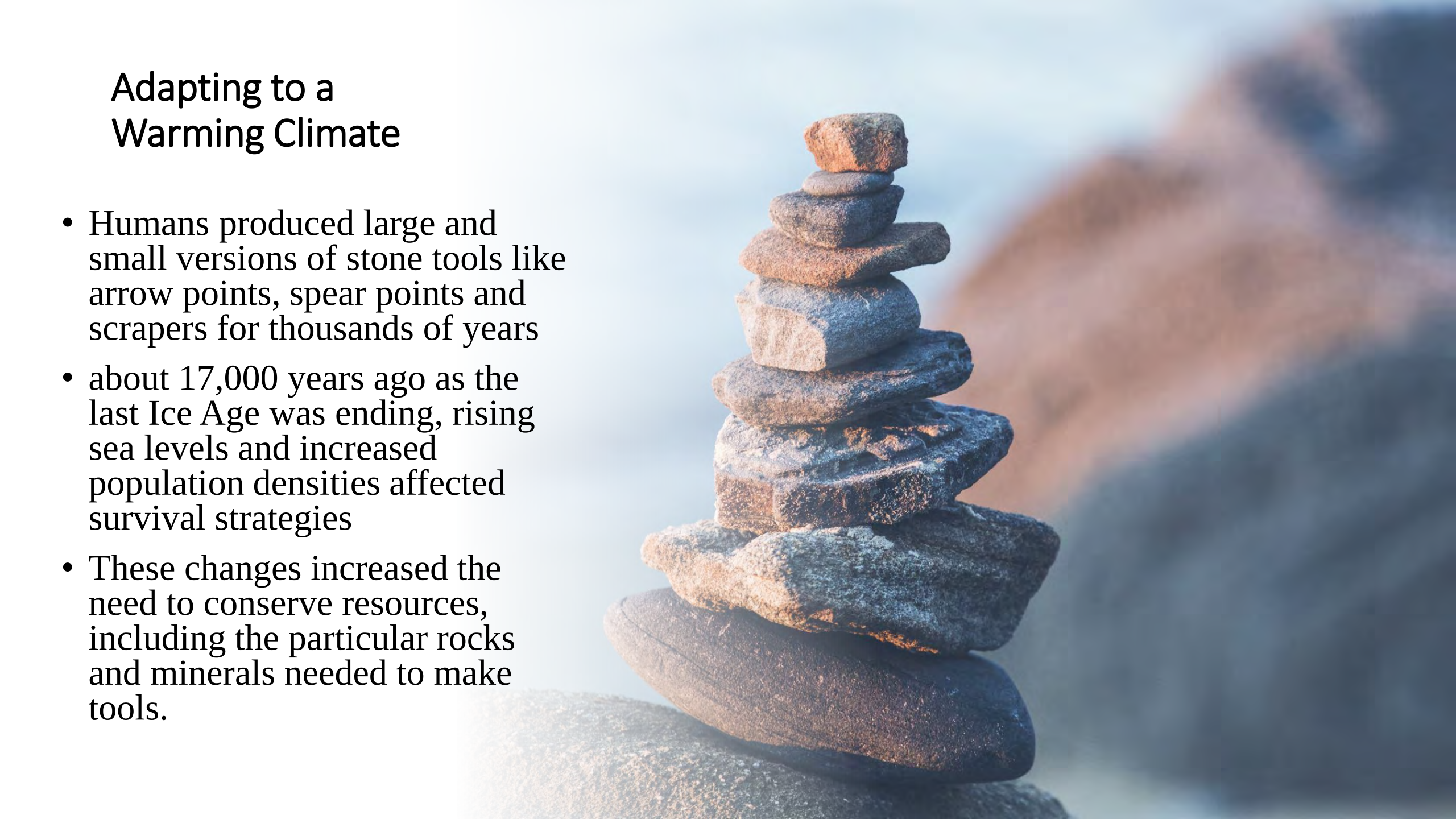
- Surviving Humans adapted to colder conditions

Cave In China at End of Ice Age

- Earliest pottery so far discovered
- Used in a cave in Southern China from as far back as 19,000 BP
- Cooking of wild grasses, including boiling and steaming of millet

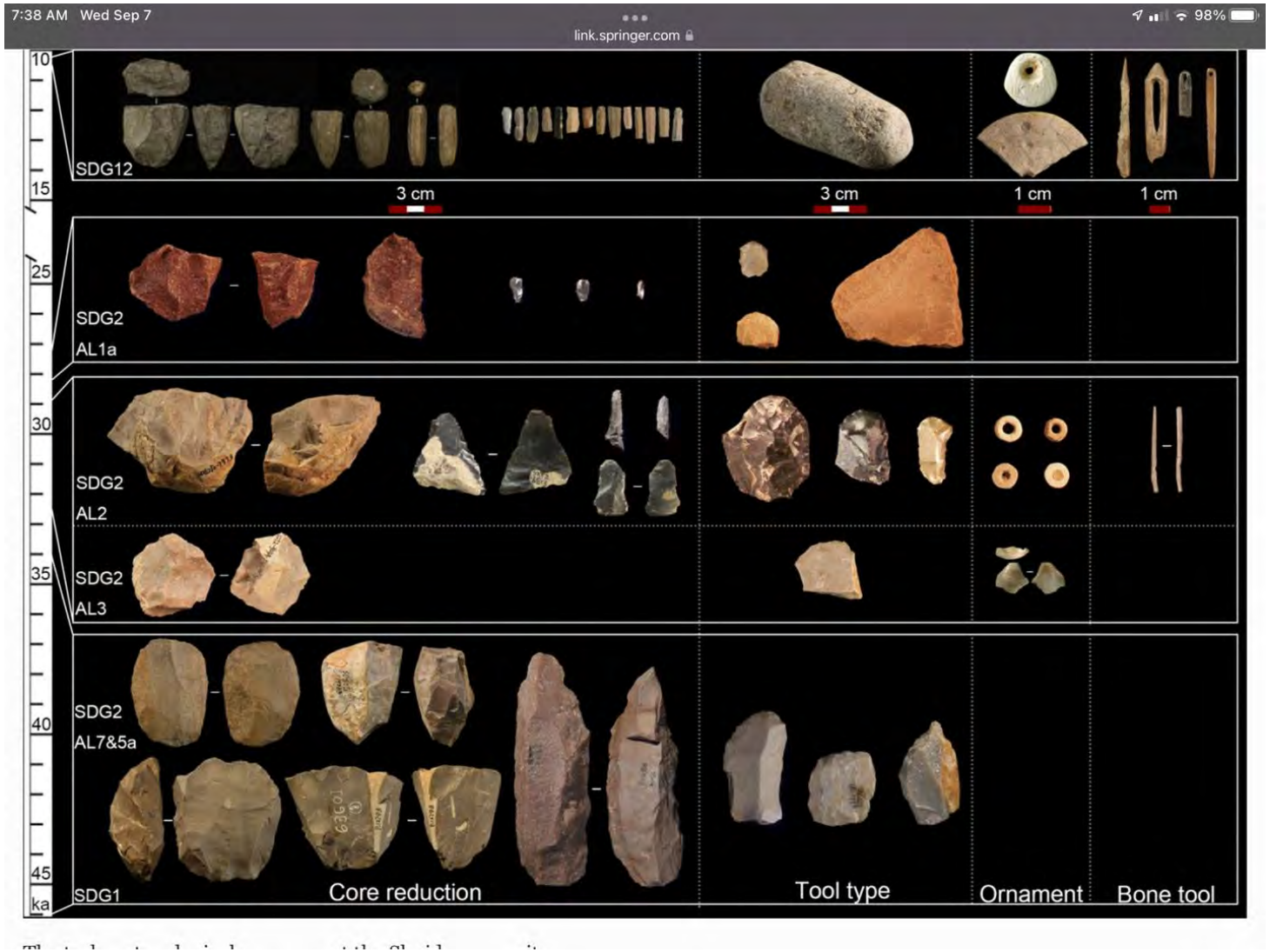
Adapting to a Warming Climate

- Humans produced large and small versions of stone tools like arrow points, spear points and scrapers for thousands of years
- about 17,000 years ago as the last Ice Age was ending, rising sea levels and increased population densities affected survival strategies
- These changes increased the need to conserve resources, including the particular rocks and minerals needed to make tools.



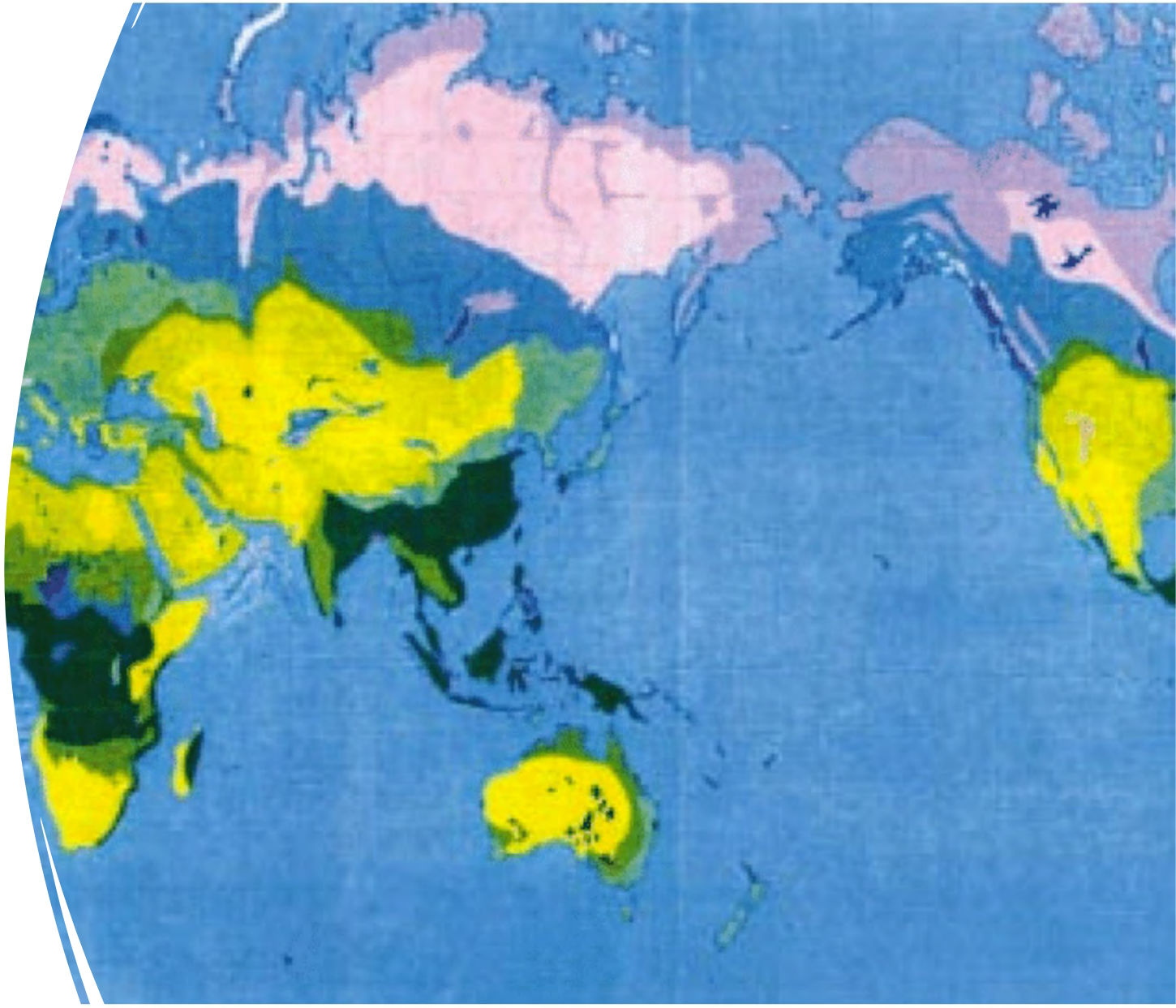
Increasing Tool Miniaturization

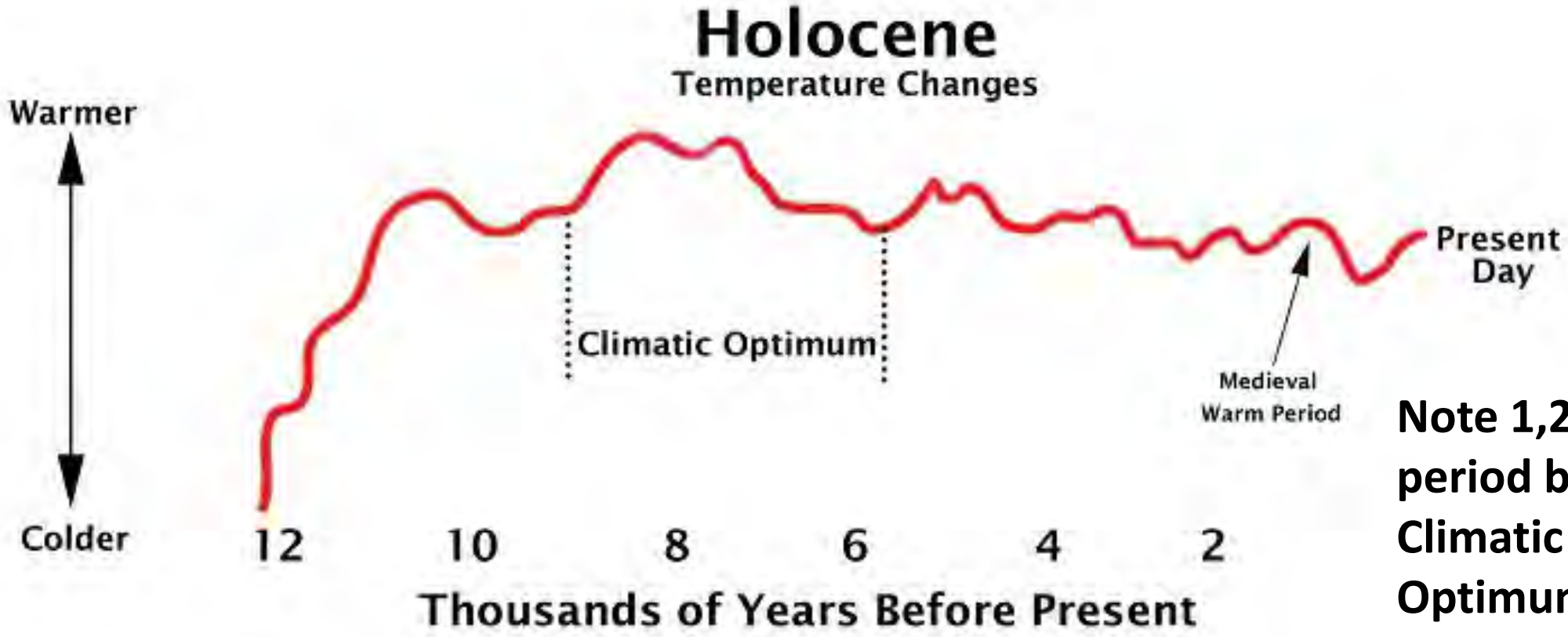
- From a site in North-Central China
- The tools or unfinished blanks are from 45,000 thru 10,000 BP
- Small weapons points were more efficient; good awls & needles for warm clothing



The Recent Warm Period aka Climatic Optimum: 9,000 to 5,000 BP

- Humans refined tools and strategies for food
- Dates could be expressed as 7,000 – 3,000 BCE (Before Common Era)
- The apparent steady warming worldwide from the Last Glacial Maximum was interrupted by:
- A sudden cold period lasted from 12,900 – 11,700 BP called “Younger Dryas” period; see next slide





Note 1,200 year period before the Climatic Optimum

EARLY CIVILIZATIONS

- **China’s Main River Systems:**
- Yellow River
- Yangtze River
- Pearl River
- Plus tributaries

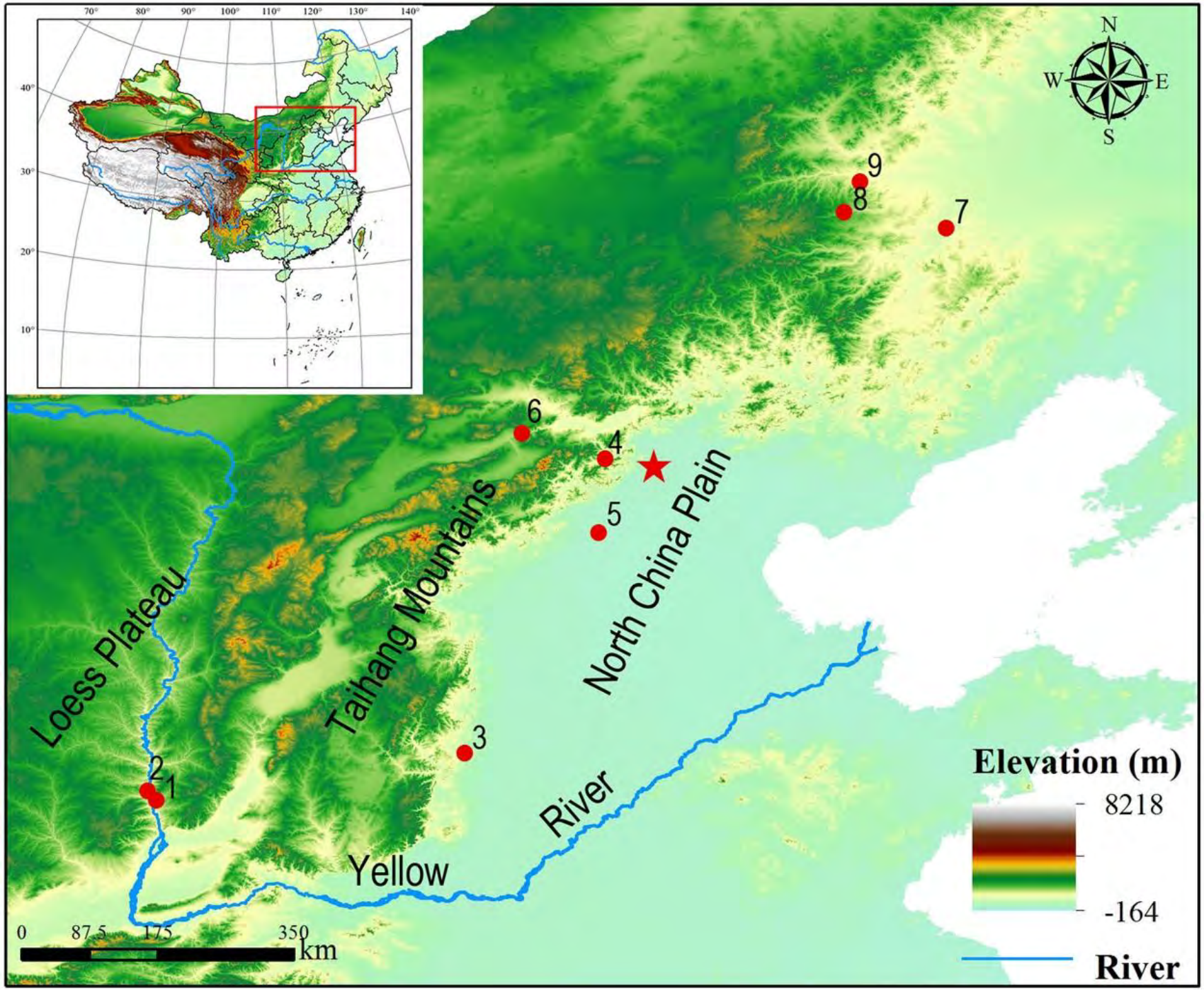
Yellow River

The Yellow Earth:
The Loess Plateau

Circa 10,000 BP: Farming Settlements in North China

Loc #4 & #5: Earlier Signs of Millet Grown there

- Red Star is the present Beijing
- Dogs Domesticated
- Grinding tools
- Pottery making common
- Hunting-gathering still utilized



Jiangzhai Settlement

- Example of a circa 6,500 BP Neolithic site
- Pottery Kiln in the foreground
- Semi-subterranean homes near rectangular community buildings
- Central area for animals
- Burials outside boundary (see next slide)


Jiangzhai Settlement:
Moat on three sides;
river on fourth side

Jiangzhai as a Late-Neolithic Settlement

- Buildings arranged by Clan
- Larger structures used for regular feasting
- Specialized pottery for brewing & serving Millet Ale
- Silk raising began in this era

Settlements in Southern China

- Rice the primary grain, raised since ca. 9,000 BP
- Yangtze River fostered civilizations at about same time as North-China/Yellow River areas
- Land not as fertile as in the North China Plains

China's original cultural revolution

Starting more than 5000 years ago, many settlements arose along the Yangtze and Yellow rivers and in what is now Sichuan province. Although none was as large and sophisticated as Liangzhu, they point to an early culture that is rewriting Chinese prehistory

• Neolithic sites

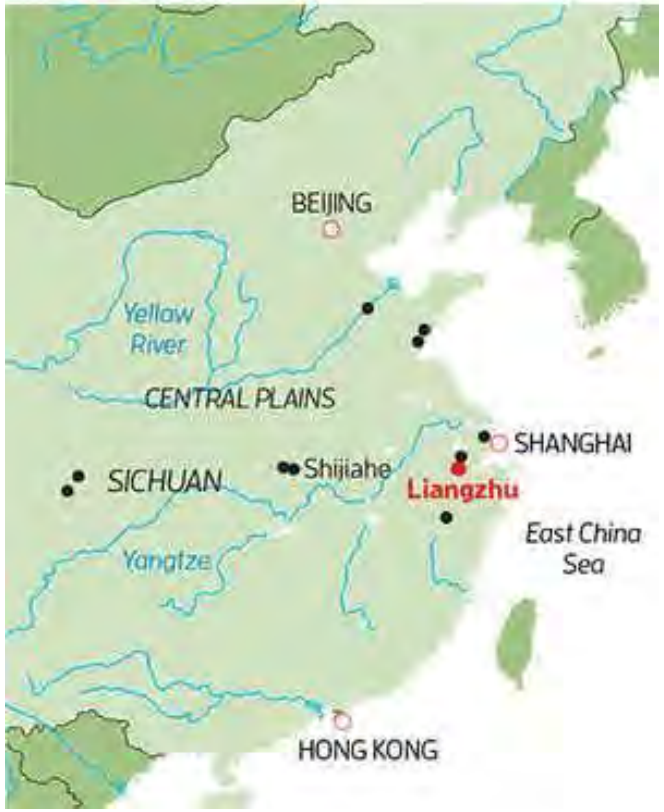
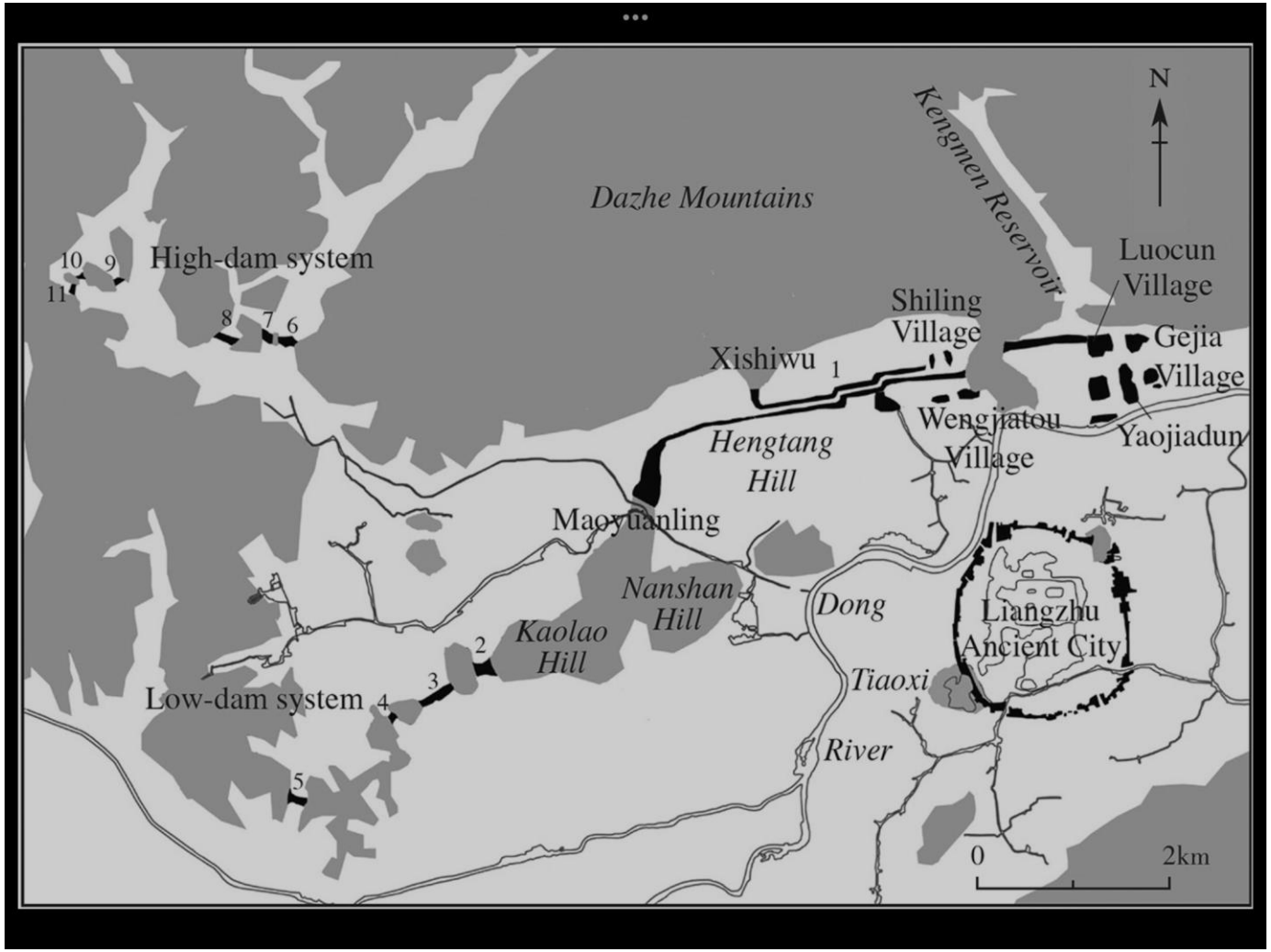


Image of the Liangzhu Culture 5,200 -4,300 BP; near Yangtze Delta

Liangzhu

- Eleven dams
- Large reservoir cut thru 65 feet of rock
- Moveable baskets of rocks adjusted water levels at dams and reservoirs
- Last two centuries saw drier conditions



Liangzhu Culture

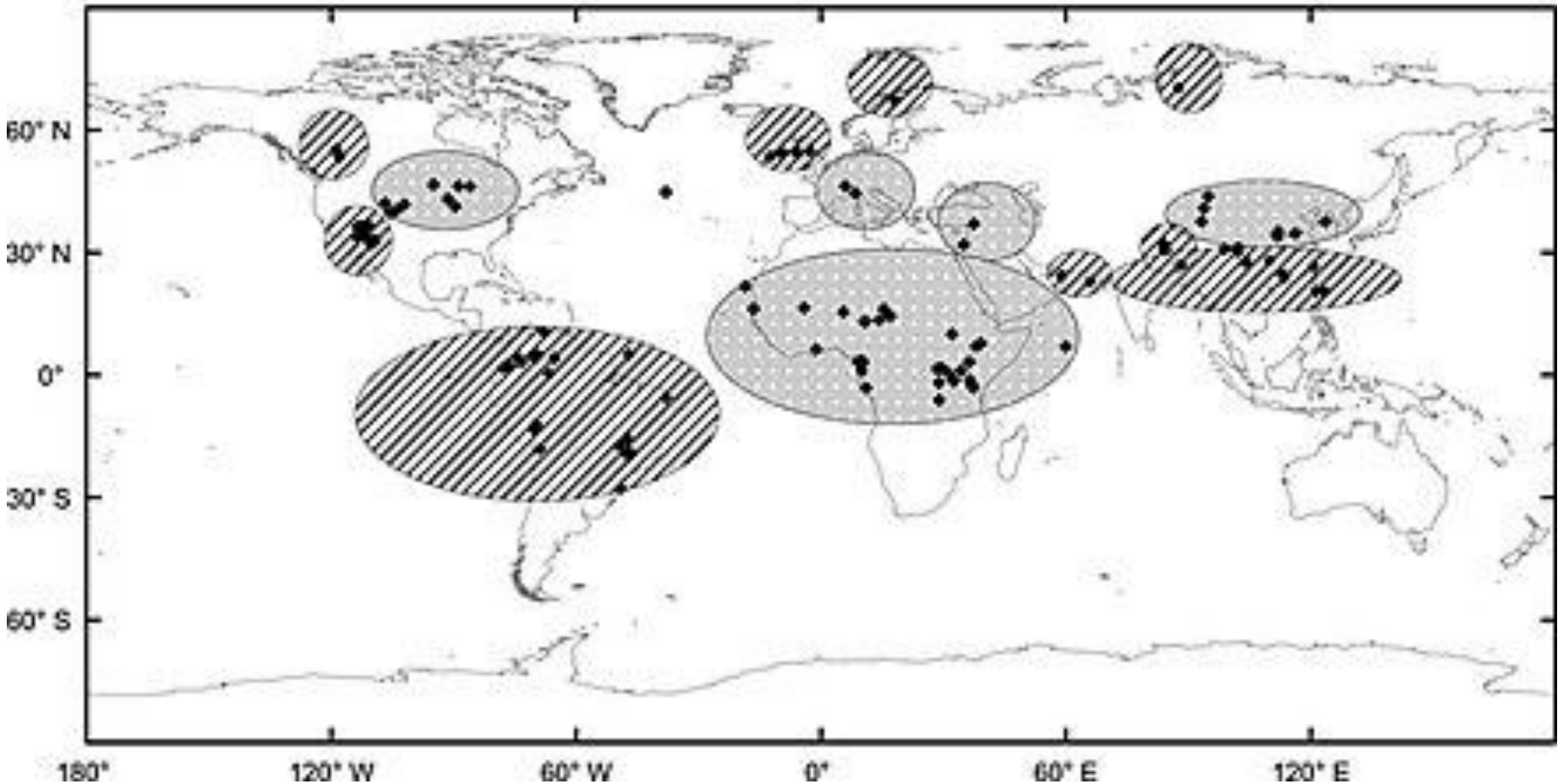
- Image at right is likely represents a religious/political leader, depicted surmounting an animal-like deity
- Largest city about 25,000 residents
- Jade objects exported over wide area, especially to influential culture to the north of Yangtze Delta
- Advanced water engineering made possible efficient communication, rice growing and flood protection
- Massive floods around 4.2 Kiloyear Event destroyed this civilization

Liangzhu Burials

Elites favored with the most expensive objects

Liangzhu Bi Disks

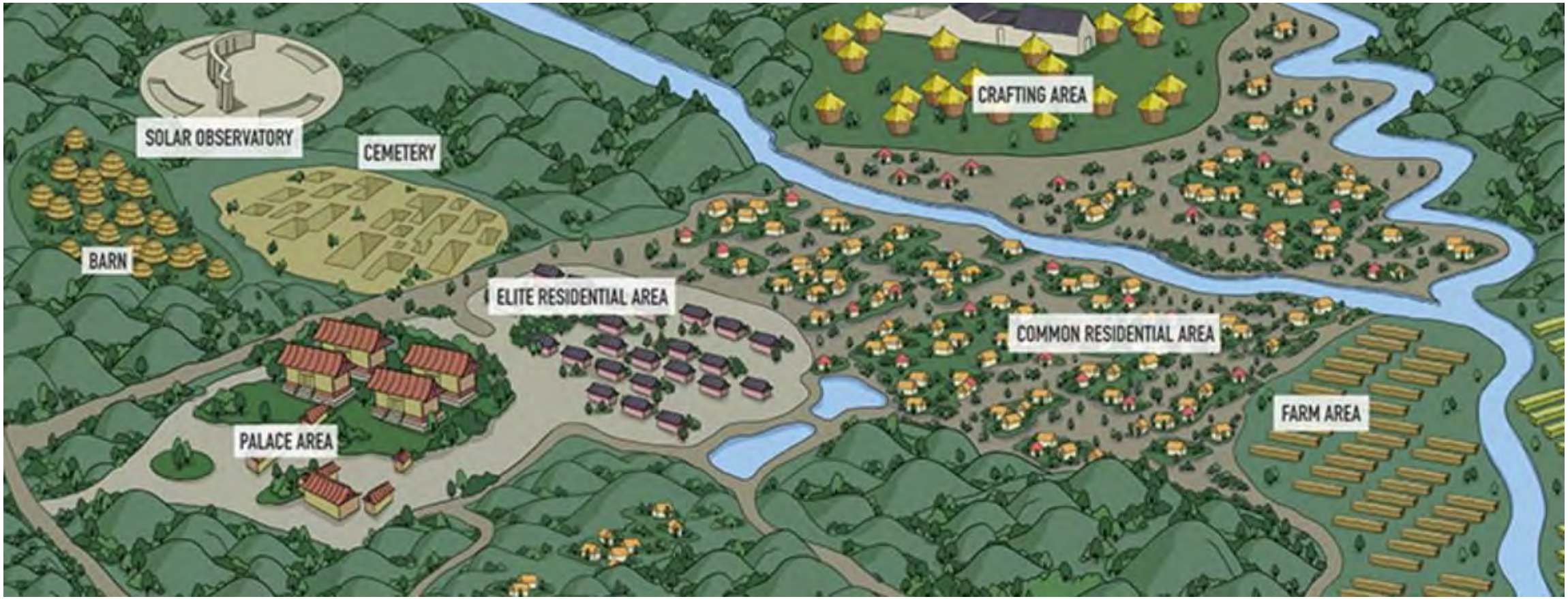
Climate Change 4,200 Years Ago: Known as the “4.2 Kiloyear Event:” Diagonals are floods; Dots show unusual dryness



4.2 Kiloyear Event

- The 4.2-kiloyear BP event was one of the most severe climatic events of the Holocene epoch
- Starting around 2200 BC, it probably lasted the entire 22nd century BC.
- It may have caused the collapse of
- Old Kingdom in Egypt
- Akkadian Empire in Mesopotamia, and the
- Liangzhu culture in the lower Yangtze River area.
- The collapse of the Indus Valley Civilisation, with some of its population moving southeastward to follow the movement of their desired habitat, as well as the migration of Indo-European-speaking people into India.

Taosi Site in Northern China 4,300 – 3,900 BP

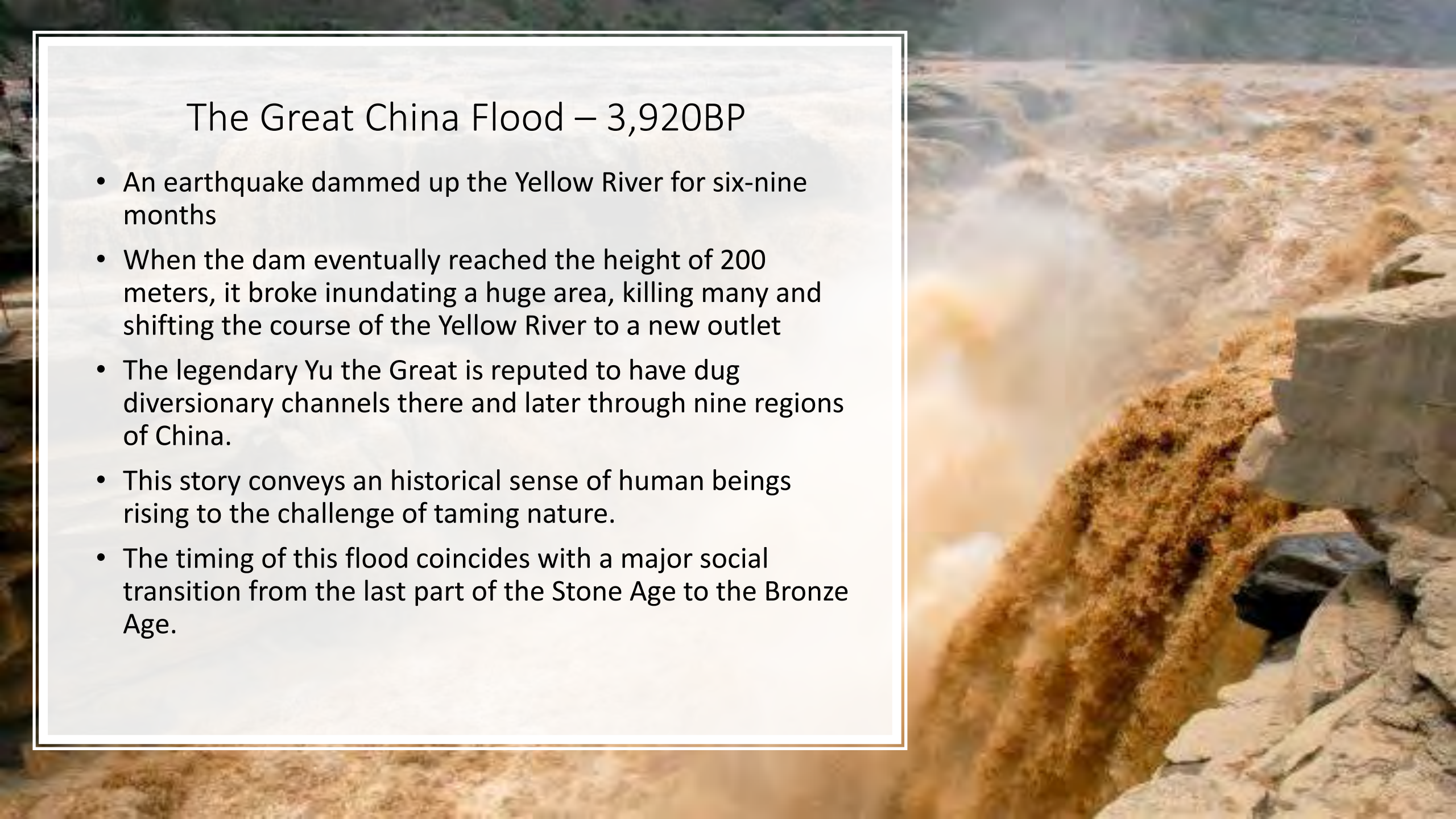


Taosi Observatory

- The four seasonal events were shown by the view through gaps in the stones
- Additional astronomical data would be important to note:
  - Confluence of visible planets
  - Current location of “True North”

The Great China Flood – 3,920BP

- An earthquake dammed up the Yellow River for six-nine months
- When the dam eventually reached the height of 200 meters, it broke inundating a huge area, killing many and shifting the course of the Yellow River to a new outlet
- The legendary Yu the Great is reputed to have dug diversionary channels there and later through nine regions of China.
- This story conveys an historical sense of human beings rising to the challenge of taming nature.
- The timing of this flood coincides with a major social transition from the last part of the Stone Age to the Bronze Age.



Yu the Great

- Recent news photo at right: celebrating the birthday of Yu
- Besides controlling flooding, Yu the Great is believed to be the Founder of the so far unverified First Chinese Dynasty – The Xia Dynasty