



China, from Earliest Times through 20thC

**Fall 2025 Marist CLS
Class Two**

Advanced Early Chinese Cultures ~ Previously Explored in Class One ~

Liangzhu

Southern China near Yangtze Rive
5,300 - 4200BP



Taosi Site – Late Longshan Culture

Just north of the “Central Plains”
4,300 - 3,900BP



Longshan Culture; circa 3,000 – 2,000 BCE

- ***Right oval*** is the ***Shandong Peninsula***;
- ***left oval*** is ***Central Plains***
- Liangzhu Culture had extensive trade with the Shandong inhabitants
- Longshan pottery set a very high standard for elite consumption, at a time when jade was the alternative (no bronze yet)



Longshan Culture Pottery

Sophisticated black egg-shell pottery made possible by development of the fast potter's wheel



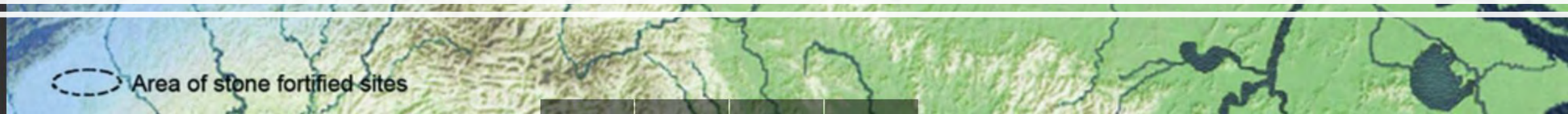
Black egg-shell pottery stemmed cup of the Shandong Longshan



White pottery gui.



Stone-Fortified Towns of Late Longshan Culture



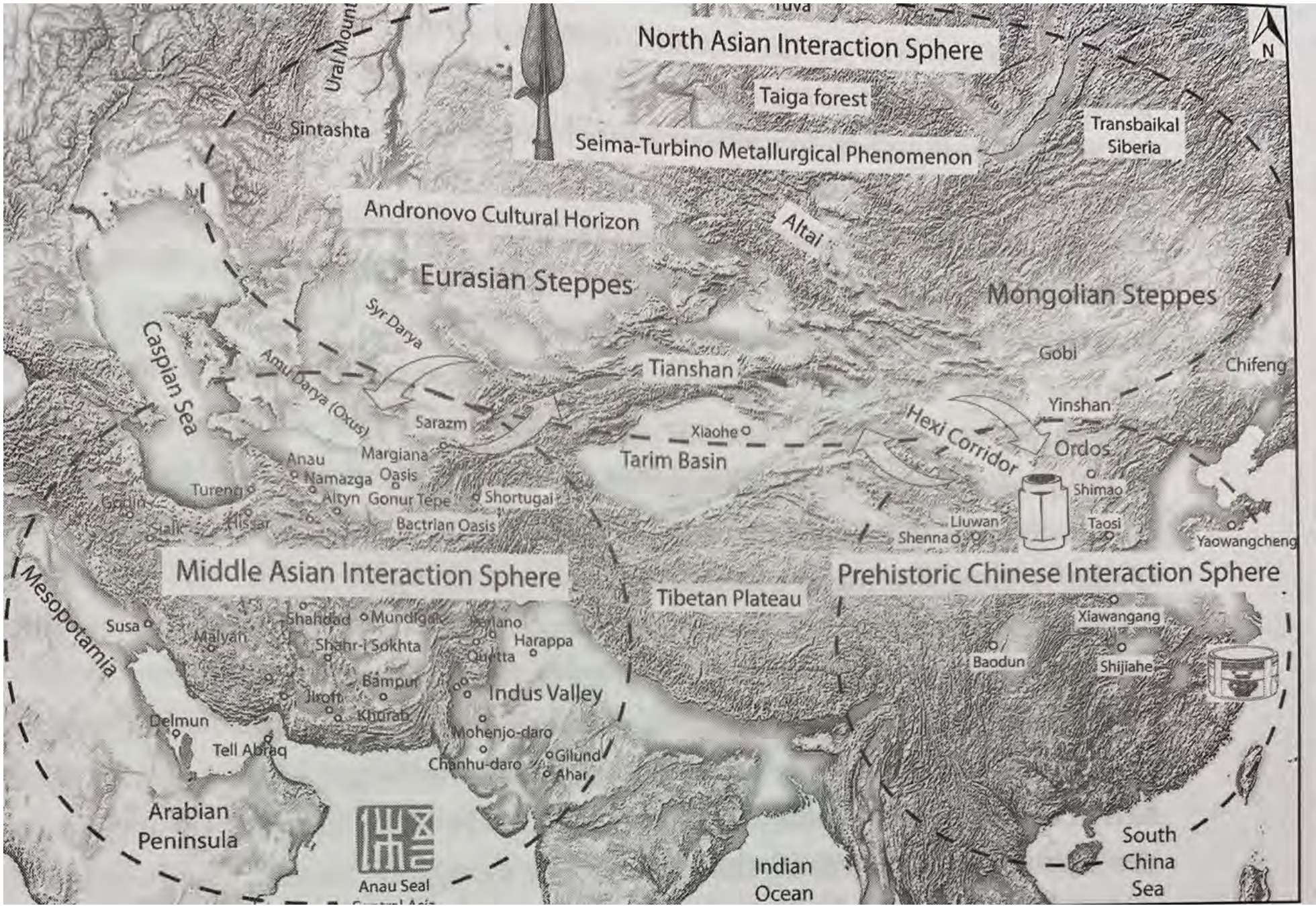
Shimao Site; circa 2,300 – 1,800 BCE



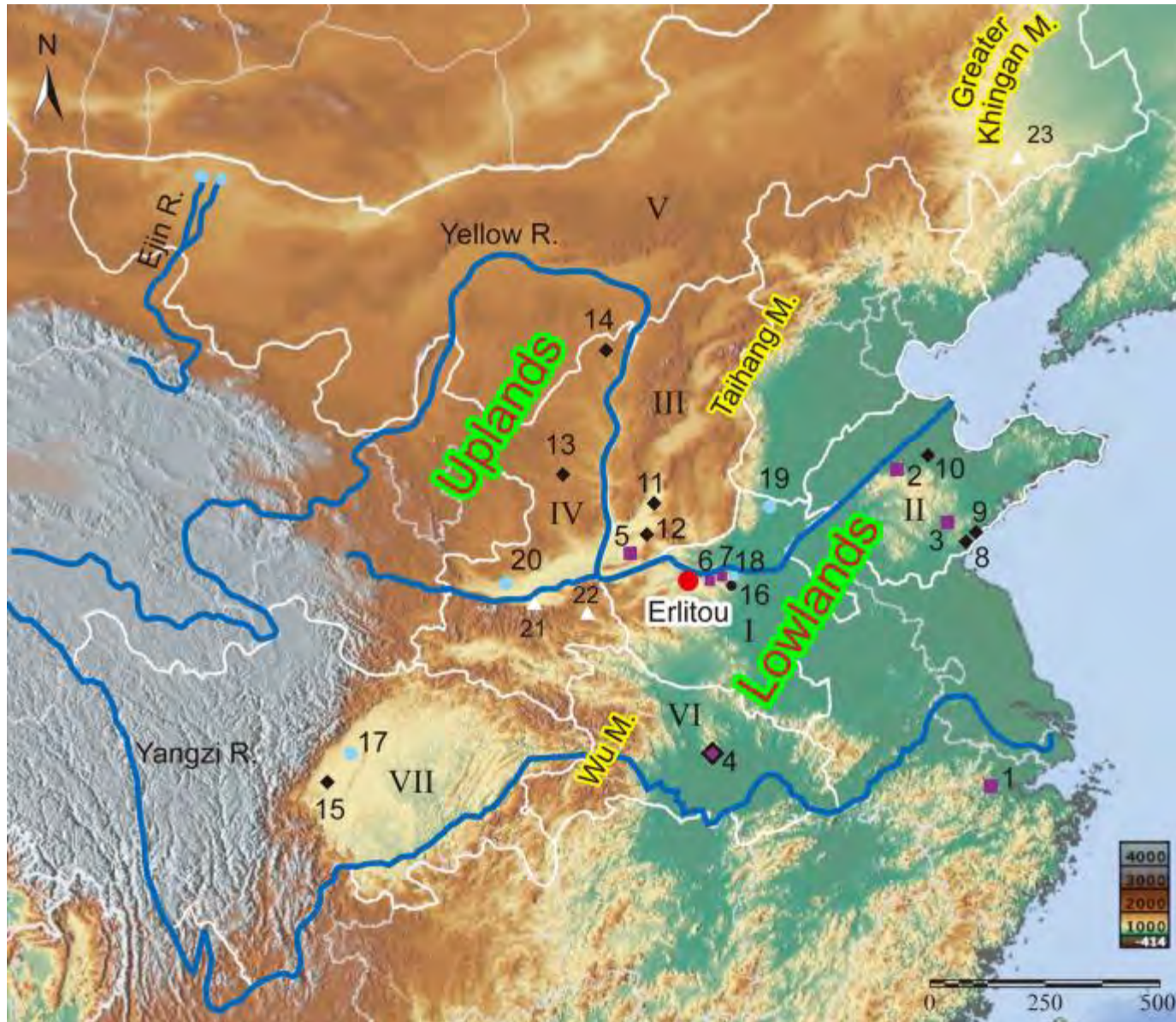
Shimao: This Era's Largest City Near Mongolian Steppes



- Tribes with advanced metallurgy from north brought bronze devices to Shimao
- Only large city in this era with a stone fortress
- Eleven fortified cities and 190 settlements nearby
- Taosi, a likely rival was closer to area's expanding populations



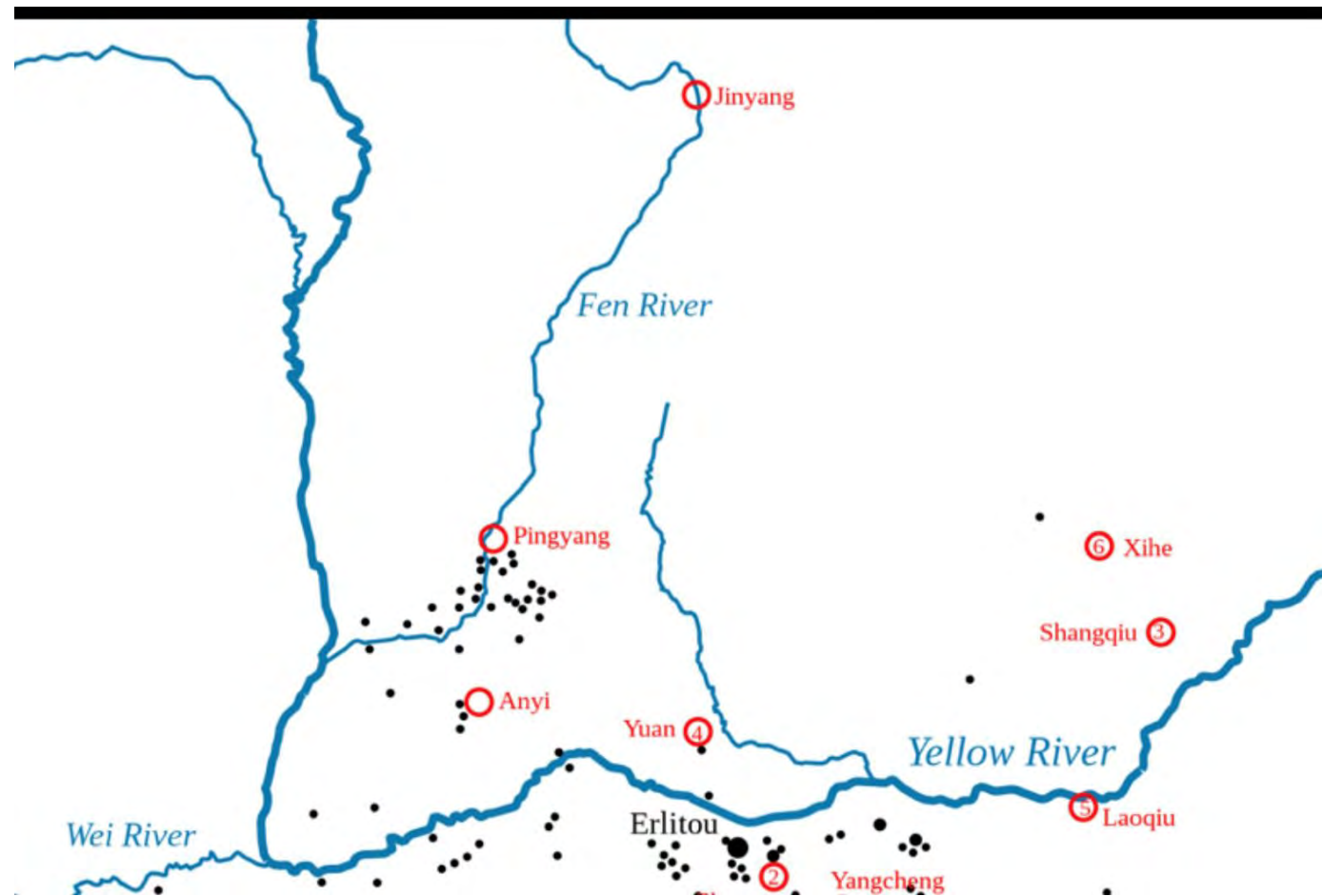
China Interacts with Steppe Peoples



Erlitou Culture 1900-1500 BCE

- Rapid population increase AFTER Longshan Culture sites had already declined
- Thought by some to be home of the ***Xia Dynasty***
- First large city to be laid out in square fashion
- Temples aligned to the “Current North Pole’
- Organized neighborhoods for craft production
- First Bronze working
- Established trade ties with both the North and South

Some of the Erlitou Culture Sites





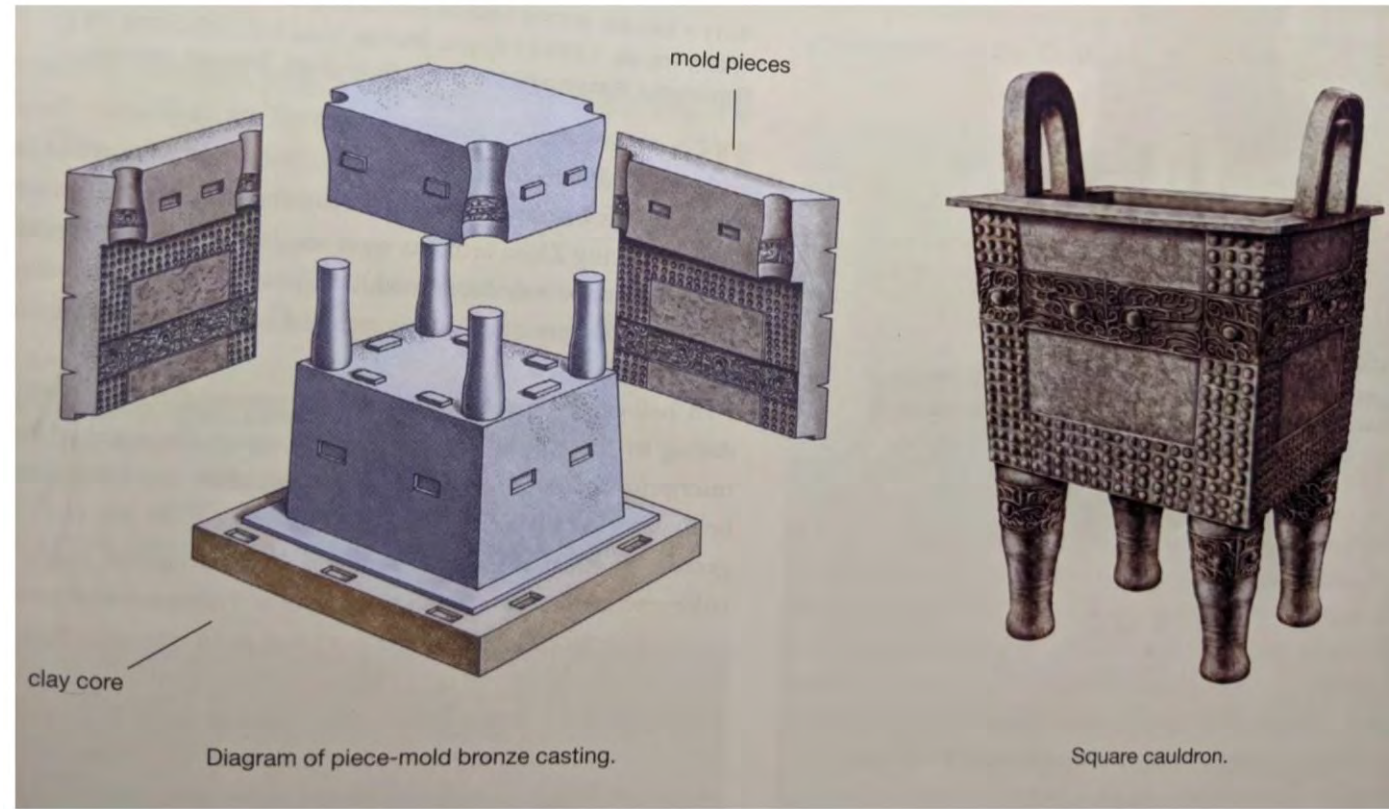
China's Bronze Age

“Ding” Bronze Vessels (Some were waist high or more)

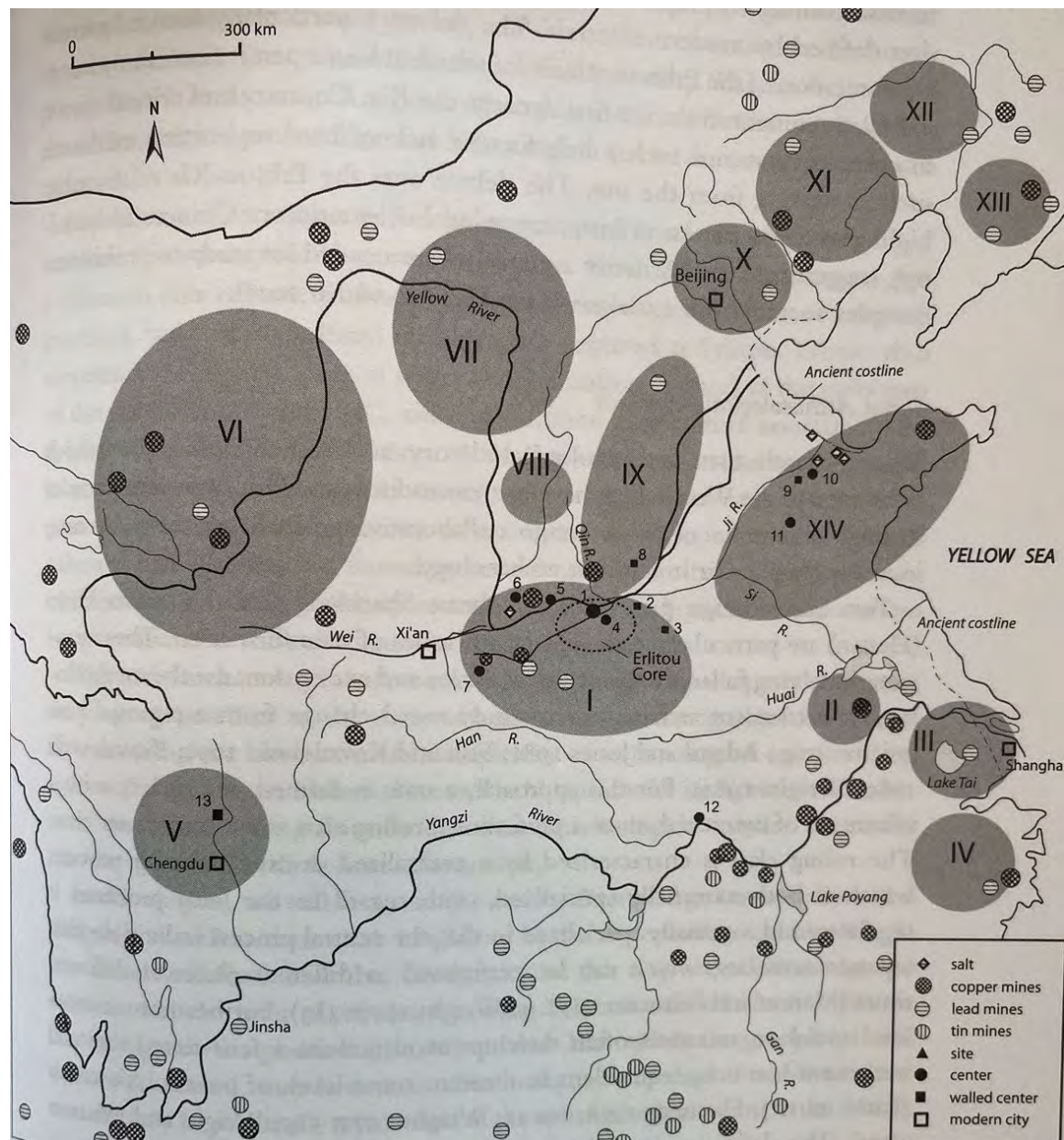


Piece-Mold Casting

- Create a model in clay
- Press slabs of clay against the dry model to create a mold
- Construct a smaller clay core to fit inside
- Lock these elements together using keys or mortises
- Pour molten bronze into the spaces between the mold and the core(s)
- When cool, clean the pieces and braze them together
- Molds and cores could not be reused, but a series of molds could be made from the same model



Sources of Materials for Bronze



Shang Dynasty circa 1,600 – 1,045 BCE



- How this replaced the possible Xia Dynasty is only attested to by writings of centuries later
- First dynasty that is attested by contemporary writing
- Came to power around **“Five Planet” confluence**
- Shang King was both the prime military leader and chief diviner, using **“ding” bronze vessels** as part of elaborate ceremonies
- Bureaucracy of hereditary elites, with control over many aspects of society
- Human sacrifice and rich tombs

Shang Civilization

- These “**Oracle Bones**” were the known writing that Shang utilized
- Divination performed on turtle shells or cow bones beginning 1,250 BCE
- Cow scapula at right
- Sophistication of language indicates a long genesis before these divination records appear





Turtle Plastron

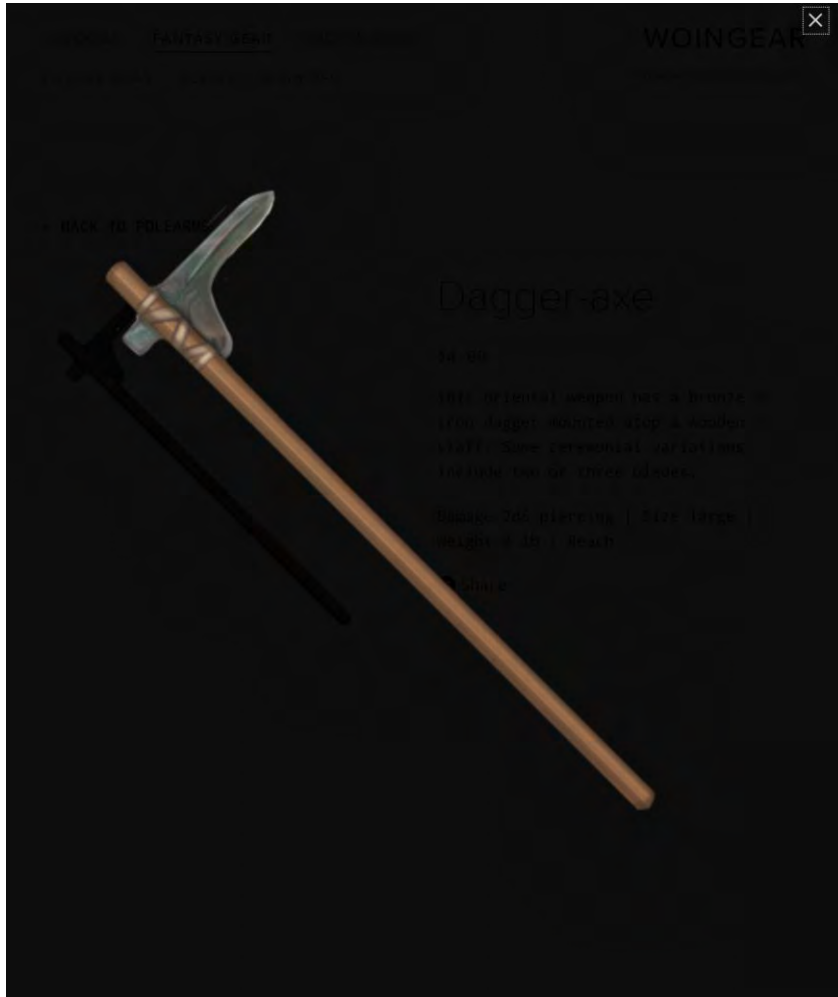
Divination on various bones or shells, but **without** writing had been used for centuries

Basic Chinese Language
Rules are Unchanged
through Centuries:

- Subject, Verb, Object
- No plurals
- No cases
- Time expressed in context of the sentence
- Four evolutions of same word at right:



Warfare Becomes Bloodier

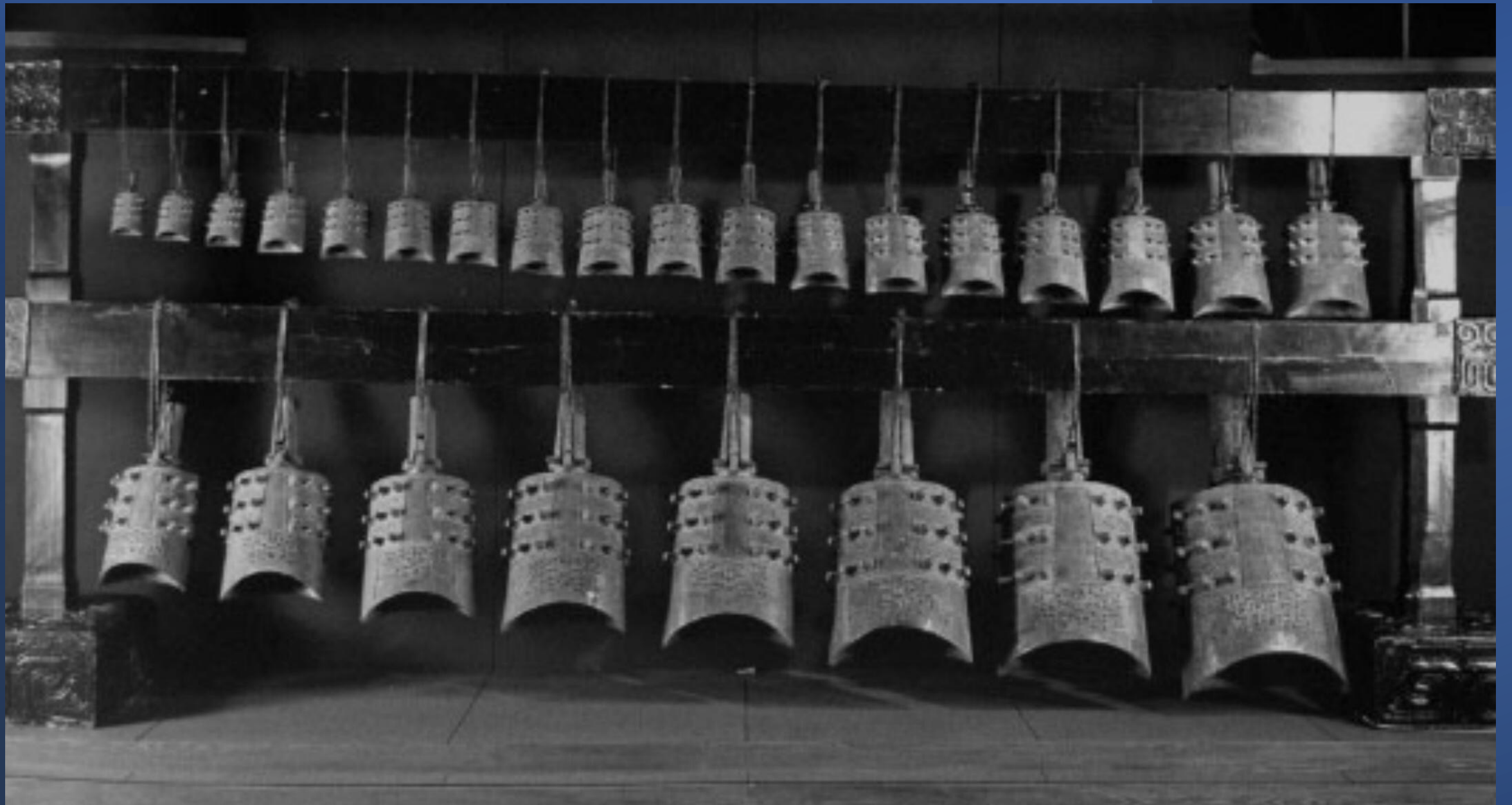


- New weapons, such as the Dagger Axe (at left) appear
- “Barbarian” tribes are engaged, as enemies and sometimes Allies
- Some of the same barbarians that introduced bronze and wheat now cause adoption of chariots for battles
- New technology breeds new specialists and their managers
- Losers in the frequent battles provide victims for sacrifice who become part of divination questions

Shang Consort Lady Fu Hao

- Despite male-dominated society by this period, Chinese noble women have often ultimately directed events
- Lady Hao led armies in battle
- Her tomb was exceptionally richly appointed for this era
- Also present was a full war chariot and horses

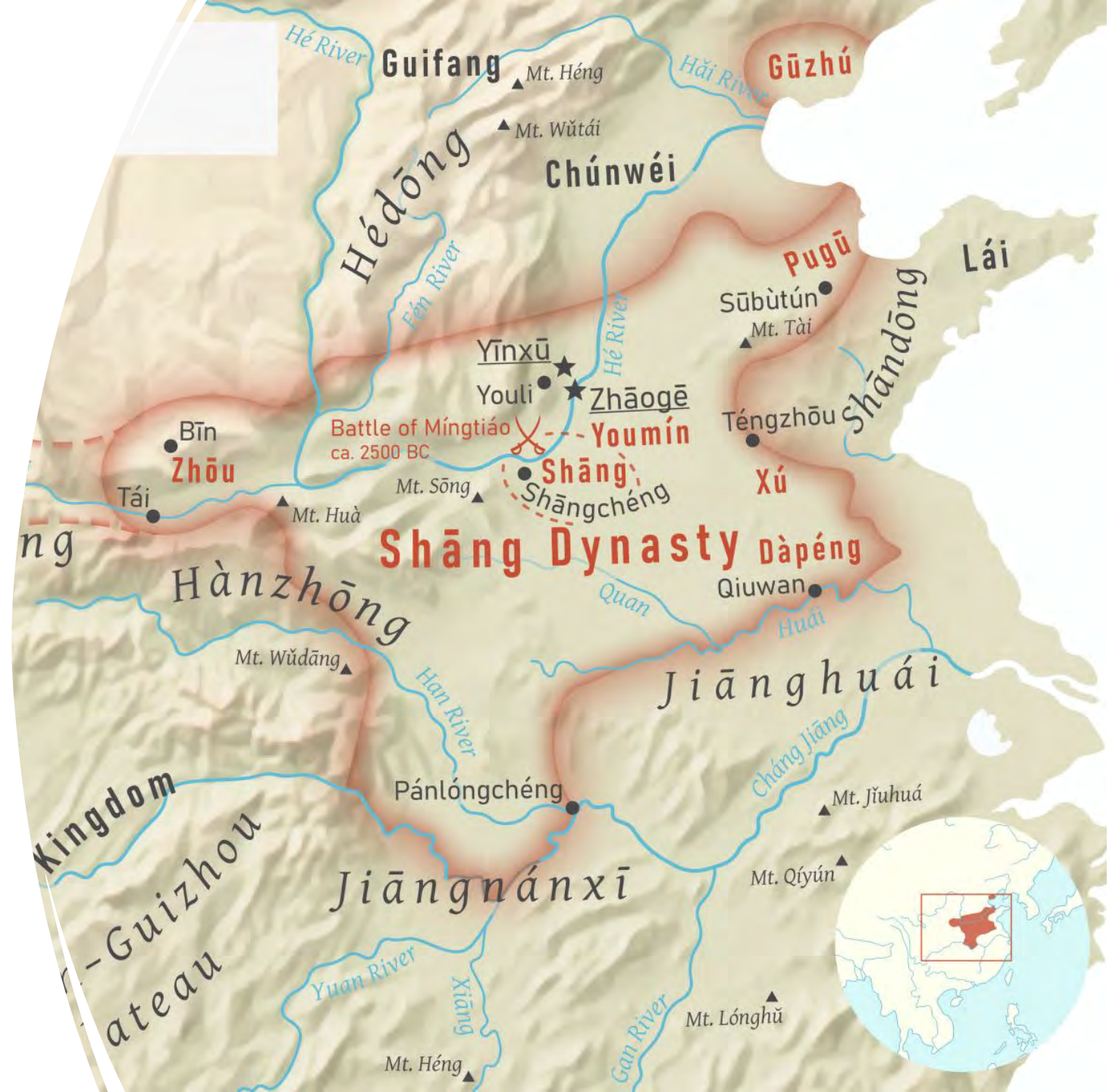




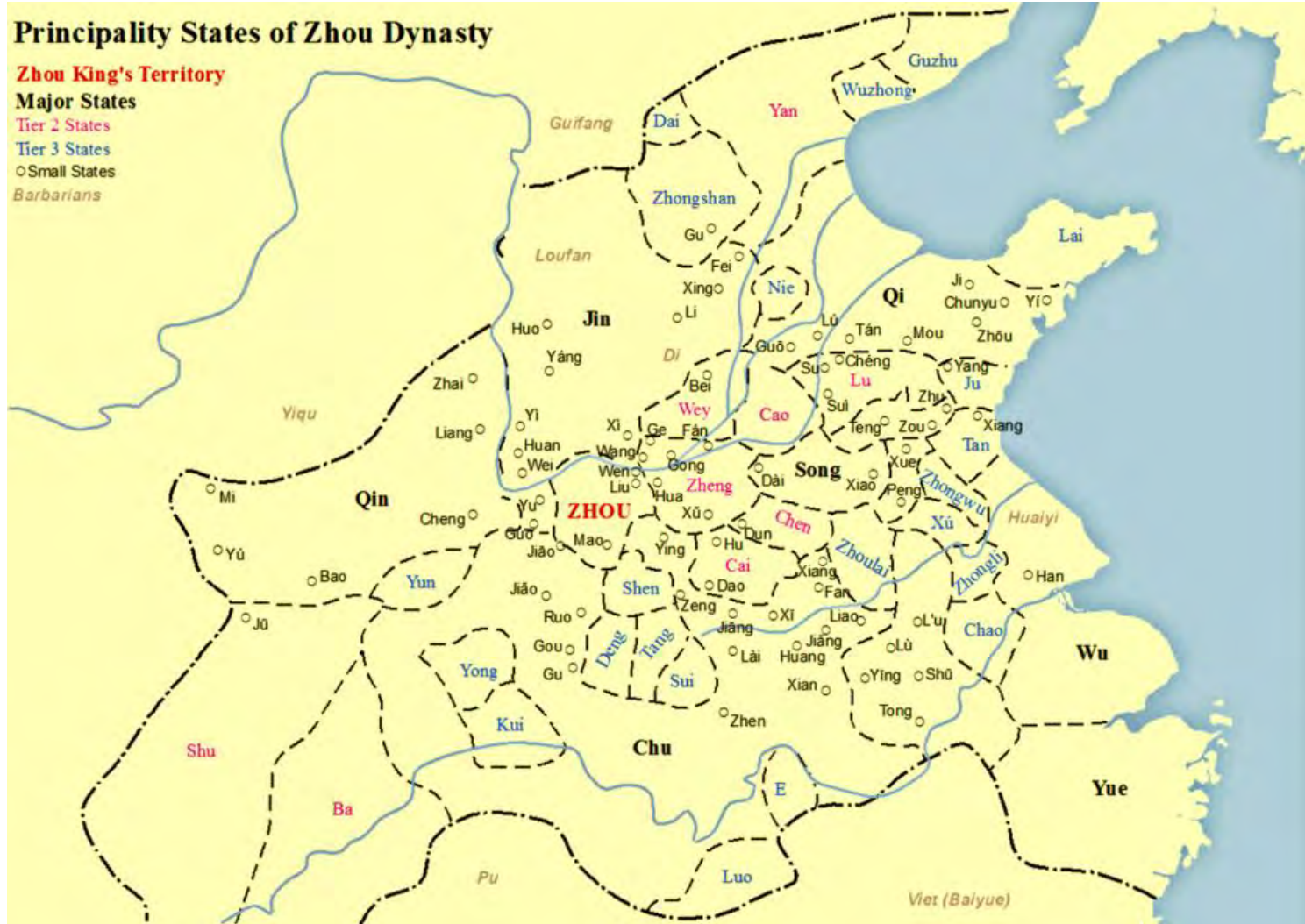
Dynastic Change

Shang gives way to the Zhou

- The Zhou people lived in the Wei River Valley; west of Shang heartland
- Zhou organized a federation of former Shang allies; shifted the flow of tribute to themselves
- Shang incurred increasing difficulty repressing the barbarians; lost the backing of allied states
- Zhou took over; no signs of a pitched battle have so far appeared
- Later documents paint the late Shang as ineffective, losing the Mandate of Heaven



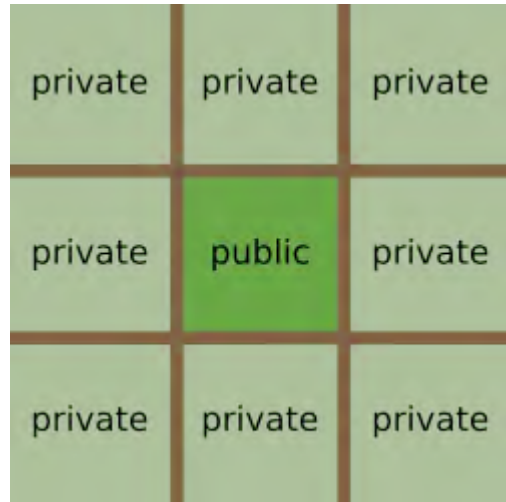
Zhou Dynasty 1,046 - 256 BCE



- The Zhou kings used Bronze ding vessels in rituals and increasingly awarded them to loyal vassals and successful leaders, with inscriptions inside
- First introduced “*well-field*” system for improved agriculture; named *for* 井 *jingtian zhi* Chinese character

The Era of Well-field System 井- jingtian zhi

Industry and Irrigation/Flood Control Efforts Demand More Resources



- Most lands were owned by nobles and worked by serfs.
- The land was divided into nine squares with the produce from the middle square taken by the government and that of surrounding squares kept by nobles and serfs.
- Government stored surplus food for times of famine
- Increased bronze smelting needed for making weapons and ritual vessels.
- Metal crafting and other industries were dominated by the nobility
- Irrigation and hydraulic engineering became formalized. The chancellor of the state of Wei, Sunshu Ao is credited for creating a large reservoir in what is now Anhui Province, that irrigated six million acres



Western Zhou and the Eastern Zhou

- Historians divide the Zhou era into two periods, the initial “Western” Zhou because the dynasty’s ritual capital was initially in the west, in the Wei River Valley
- 771BCE - the Zhou court moved, under duress, eastward to a site near the present-day city of Luoyang, in the Central Plain

Spring and Autumn period, lasting from 770 to 476 BCE or so



- 771 BCE - two tributary states and a barbarian group invaded Zhou capital, beginning a period of reduced Zhou power, usually labeled the Spring and Autumn period
- NOTE: **Confucius** lived from (551–479 BCE). Although his work was not effective for some years, it was shaped by the experiences in this period
- The Zhou court, having lost its homeland in the Guanzhong region, held nominal power, but had real control over only a small royal demesne centered on Luoyi.
- As the power of the Zhou kings waned, these fiefdoms became increasingly independent states
- The most important states (known later as the twelve vassals) came together in regular conferences where they decided important matters, such as military expeditions against foreign groups or against offending nobles. During these conferences one vassal ruler was sometimes declared hegemon

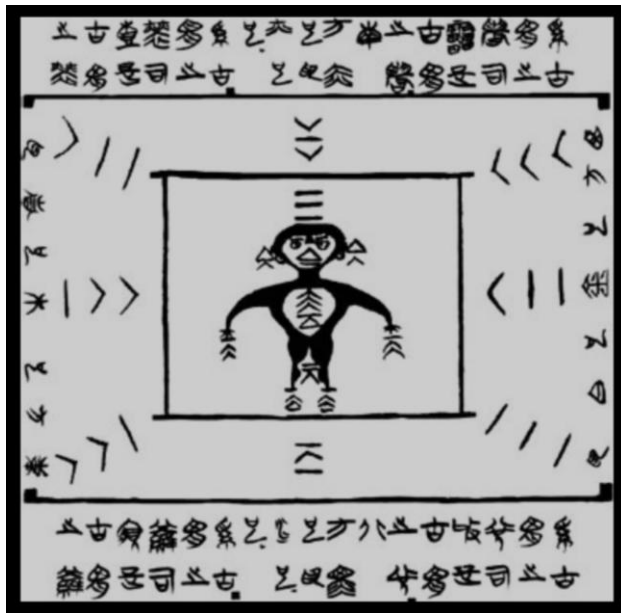
Beginning of the Warring States Period



- More powerful states annexed smaller ones. By the 6th century BCE most small states had disappeared
- Some southern states claimed independence from the Zhou. Over the next two centuries, the four most powerful states struggled for power
- Eventually the dukes of Lu, Jin, Zheng, Wey and Qi would all become figureheads to powerful aristocratic families
- The gradual Partition of Jin, one of the most powerful states, marked the end of the Spring and Autumn period

Divination by Yarrow Sticks

- Animal shell divination was superseded by casting yarrow sticks, coinciding with the formalization of the “Book of Ching”
- The 50 stalks generated hexagrams corresponding to I Ching passages
- This reflects a shift in ritual culture from shamanic roots to a systematized, literature-based tradition accessible to scholars



Sanxingdui Culture Circa 1800-900BCE

- Located in present day Sichuan Province, not far from the Capital of Chengdu
- One leg of the Silk Road
- Resource-rich and relatively isolated, its bronze work was influenced by trade with south-east Asian cultures



Sanxingdui Relics from circa 1,200 BCE



End of Formal Presentation



- Sanxingdui Relics from circa 1,200 BCE

- The **Sanxingdui culture** is contemporaneous with the [Shang dynasty](#), but it developed a different artistic style of bronze-making from the Shang.
- The first phase that corresponds to period I of the site belongs to the [Baodun](#), and after the final phase (period IV) the culture was succeeded by the [state of Ba](#) and [kingdom of Shu](#).
- Speculation regarding the end of the Sanxingdui culture includes that it might have been the result of natural disasters (evidence of massive flooding and an earthquake were found), or invasion by another culture. [\[29\]\[30\]](#)
- The culture was governed by a strong central [theocracy](#) with trade links to [bronze](#) from [Yin](#) and [ivory](#) from [South Asia](#).



Eastern Zhou –
Spring and
Autumn Period

Spring and Autumn period, lasting from 770 to 476 BCE or so

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Eastern Zhou

The transition from “Spring and Autumn” to “Warring States” Period



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- By the 6th century BCE most small states had disappeared
- Some southern states claimed independence from the Zhou. Over the next two centuries, the four most powerful states struggled for power, using the pretext of aid and protection to intervene and gain suzerainty over the smaller states.
- Interstate relations alternated between low-level warfare and complex diplomacy. In addition to interstate conflict, internal conflicts between state leaders and local aristocrats also occurred
- Eventually the dukes of Lu, Jin, Zheng, Wey and Qi would all become figureheads to powerful aristocratic families.
- The gradual Partition of Jin, one of the most powerful states, marked the end of the Spring and Autumn period and the beginning of the **Warring States period**

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Longshan Culture

The Transition from Late Stone Age to Dynasties

- The spread of Longshan pottery indicates both widespread trade networks and imitation of craft techniques
- Communities pioneered rammed earth for building and city walls
- Beginnings of the silk industry
- Burials indicate a transition from matrilineal clan to male-dominated hierarchy that was dominant by dynastic ages

- As archaeological evidence now reveals, Chinese civilization evolved out of competing regional cultures.
- Many of these were as culturally rich as the historically attested northern cultures, but they left no history and were forgotten
- The Xia, Shang, and Zhou—the so-called Three Dynasties—were known only from literary sources before the advent of modern archaeology
- These northern cultures of the Yellow River Plain over time produced a hybrid and relatively unified culture both typified and aided by a written language and a shared belief system.
- Before the dynasties, was the Longshan Culture; the diorama of a settlement we saw earlier went through this late stage of Stone Age or Neolithic Civilization

Zhou Dynasty - 1,046 - 256 BCE



The Zhou kings used Bronze ding vessels in rituals and increasingly awarded them to loyal vassals and successful leaders, with inscriptions inside

First introduced “*well-field*” system for improved agriculture; named *for* 井 *jing* Chinese character

North Asian Interaction Sphere

Seima-Turbino metallurgical phenomenon



Andronovo Cultural Horizon

Middle Asian Interaction Sphere



Anau seal

- Sialk
- Susa
- Delmun
- Jiroft
- Mohenjo-daro
- Harappa
- Gonur Tepe
- Sarazm
- Shorgutai

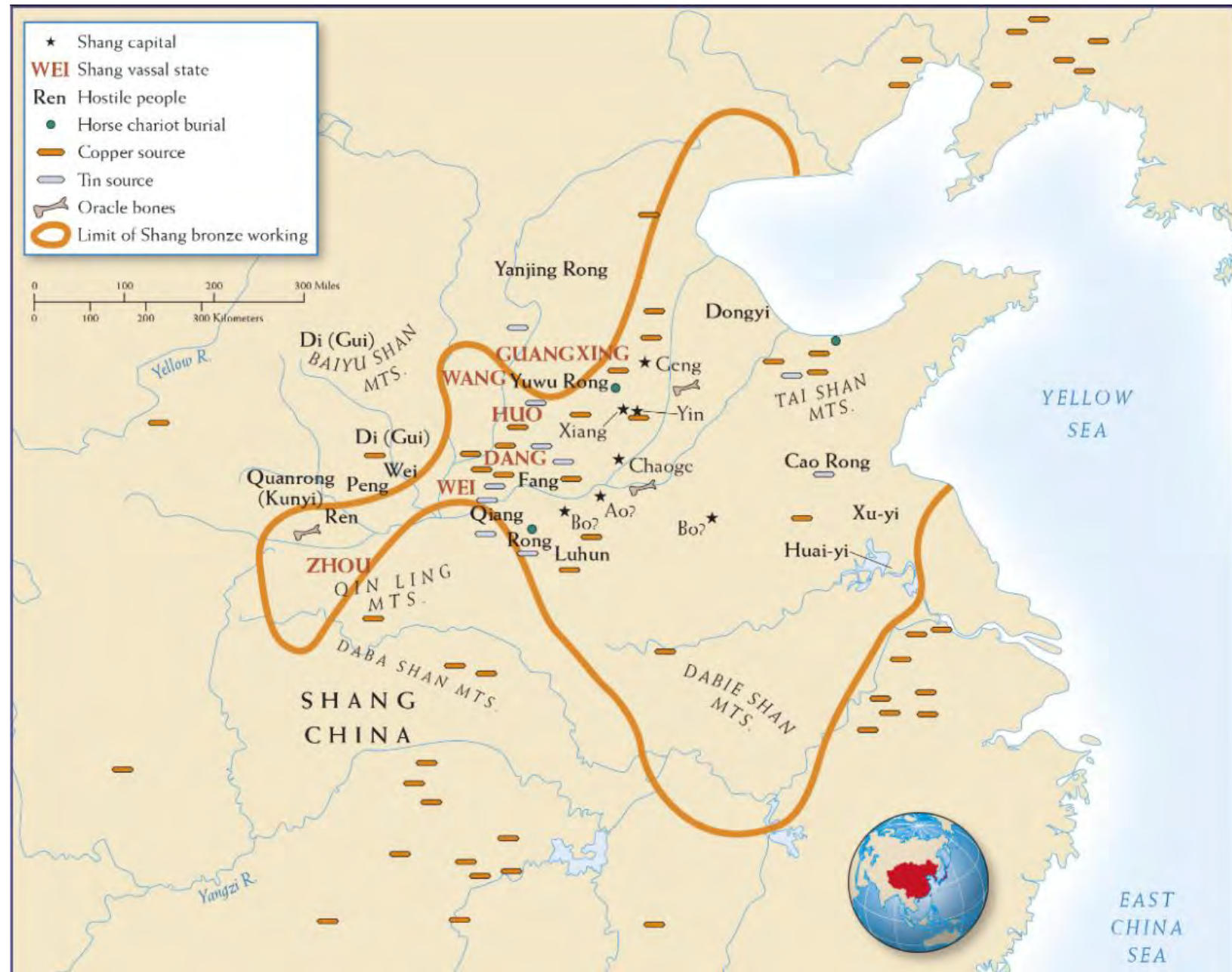
Prehistoric Chinese Interaction Sphere

- Shimao
- Taosi
- Yaowangcheng
- Shenna
- Liuwan
- Xiawanggang
- Shijiahe
- Baodun



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Shang Dynasty



Well-Field System



- By now, most lands for farming were owned by nobles and worked by serfs.
- In just one variation of the emerging Well-Field System, a piece of land was divided into nine squares with the produce from the middle square taken by the government and that of surrounding squares kept by nobles and serfs.
- This way, the government was able to store surplus food and distribute it in times of famine or bad harvest.
- Increased bronze smelting needed for making weapons and ritual vessels.
- Curiously, Farm Tools were not generally made of bronze
- Metal crafting and other industries were dominated by the nobility
- Irrigation and hydraulic engineering became formalized. The chancellor of the state of Wei, Sunshu Ao is credited for creating a large reservoir in what is now Anhui Province, that irrigated six million acres