Chapter 11: Shang China

# Chapter Summary [Copied from Olszewski 2019, Chapter 11]

* Locally domesticated plants and animals in the Yellow and Yangtze river regions of China included pigs, water buffalo, dogs, rice, and foxtail and broomcorn millet. Neolithic period groups also relied on hunted wild animals, collection of wild plant foods, and fishing.
* The tradition of building ditches around villages began during the Neolithic period and persisted into Shang and later societies.
* Some markings on Neolithic period pottery are interpreted as early evidence for writing, but it was the practice of scapulimancy (oracle bones) that best established early Chinese writing.
* Differences between people in grave goods suggesting social role distinctions may occur in the Early Neolithic period but became established in Middle (for example, Yangshao) and Late Neolithic/Chalcolithic (Longshan) times.
* Widespread interaction networks were present by the Late Neolithic period, and there is evidence of violence/conflict.
* The Early Bronze Age (Erlitou Culture) was characterized by a central, important site and many secondary- and tertiary-level sites. The interaction sphere was widespread, extending beyond its regional boundaries, with some archaeologists arguing that it represents the first “state” in China.
* The Shang Dynasty represents the first widely accepted Chinese state. Its rulers established capital cities, and in some respects it could be considered an example of a city-state.
* Shang society was not built on a religion with priests or priestesses but instead was based on ancestor veneration.
* Shang bronze vessels were decorated with animal motifs including dragons, birds, and *taotie* (two-eyed). These vessels were used in elite ritual activities associated with ancestor worship and were an important item used as gifts and in trade to other elites.
* Like elsewhere, Shang royalty and other elites were buried with large quantities of grave goods, including ritual bronze vessels and items made of exotic materials.
* Human sacrifices, as well as those of various animals, were a common practice to honor Shang elites and ancestors and for other events such as construction of buildings.
* Shang rulers and other elites used divination (scapulimancy) to make decisions about battles, alliances, and other important life activities.
* After the Shang Dynasty, the Western Zhou Dynasty ruled part of China. Their earliest kings continued many Shang period traditions including how ritual bronze vessels were manufactured and ornamented. The Eastern Zhou were the next dynasty, and then there was a long period of contentious rule by various small Chinese states. China was unified for the first time under the Emperor Qin Shi Huang in 221 BC.
* Many dynasties followed that of Qin, with the modern country of China established in AD 1911 with the overthrow of the last emperor.

# Key Terms

**Anyang**: the late Shang capital city in the Yellow River region of northern China, also called Yinxu. It was home to the ruling dynasty and had rammed earth palaces and temples, royal tombs, bronze and other workshops, residences, and large sacrificial areas.

**Banpo**: a large Yangshao Culture (Neolithic) village in China that is surrounded by a moat. Abstract signs incised on pottery are thought to be an example of shared symbols that later led to the development of writing.

**Bashidang**: a Neolithic site in the Middle Yangtze River region of China. Residents relied mainly on wild food resources but also had rice, which may have been domesticated.

**Erligang Culture**: a Bronze Age polity with its center at the site of Zhengzhou in the Yellow River region of China. It is sometimes referred to as early Shang, and dates from 1600 to 1400 BC.

**Erlitou**: a large urban site in China with evidence for an elite enclosure with palace complexes and houses for elite families as well as elite graves. It was the main center during the Erlitou Culture in the Yellow River area and held influence over a wide geographical region characterized by a hierarchy of sites.

**Erlitou** **Culture**: a Chalcolithic and Bronze Age culture in north China in the Yellow River region. Some archaeologists describe it as the first state because of increased political control over this region, shared rituals, and centralized administrative functions at the main site of Erlitou.

**Jiahu**: a large Neolithic settlement, partly surrounded by a ditch, in the Yellow River area of China that has evidence for the earliest fermented beverage, some social distinctions between people, and a subsistence economy based on both domesticated and wild foods. Interestingly, it has domesticated rice while other sites of the Peiligang Culture rely on domesticated millets.

**Jiangzhai**: an early Yangshao Culture Neolithic village in the Yellow River region of China. Evidence indicates that economy was based at the household level and that some families had more access to resources allowing them to control greater amounts of agricultural surplus.

**Longshan Culture**: a late Neolithic and Chalcolithic interaction network along the middle and lower Yellow River in China, which included standardized ways of making and decorating items such as pottery and jade. Increasing social and political complexity resulted in status differences between people, the concentration of power in the hands of fewer individuals, a settlement hierarchy with large wall settlements surrounded by smaller, unwalled sites, and evidence for warfare.

**Scapulimancy**: the use of animal shoulder bones (called oracle bones), and later also turtle plastrons, in divination (predicting future events). Early scapulimancy interpreted the patterns of cracks caused by burning; later scapulimancy involved the careful preparation of animal shoulder bones and turtle plastrons by thinning them and drilling holes in them, before submitting them to fire to produce crack patterns that could be interpreted.

**Taosi**: a Longshan Culture walled site in China that has evidence for social differences between people in the form of separation of housing and in size of graves and types of grave goods.

**Western Zhou**: the dynasty that conquered the Shang kingdom in 1045 BC; it successfully subdued several Shang rebellions, but in 770 BC, it was defeated and the period called Eastern Zhou began. Eastern Zhou was not as politically integrated and was subject to many wars with neighboring states.

**Xiaohuangshan**: an early Neolithic period village site in the Lower Yangtze River region of China. It has evidence for the use of wild rice, as well as other wild food resources.

**Xinglonggou**: an early Neolithic period village site in the Yellow River region of China with evidence for domesticated broomcorn and foxtail millet, and wild and domesticated pigs.

**Yangshao Culture**: a middle Neolithic period group along the middle Yellow River in China. Yangshao people used domesticated and wild food resources, and there is evidence for the beginning of social distinctions between people based on grave goods.

**Yuchanyan Cave**: this site in northern China has evidence for the earliest known pottery at 16,350 to 13,480 cal BC and early use of rice, although it is not clear whether the rice is wild or

domesticated.

**Zengpiyan Cave**: a hunter-gatherer-forager site in southern China that has evidence for the early use of taro and pottery within the context of high mobility rather than settled villages.

**Zhengzhou**: the main urban center of the Erligang Culture in the Yellow River area of northern China from 1600 to 1400 BC.