3: CHINA'S ROAD TO EARLY CIVILIZATION[1]

a. In what respects did the coming of agriculture during China's Beginning Neolithic not change China much compared with the preceding stage? What was radically novel about the Late Neolithic from the differing perspectives of the archaeologists, Marxists, academics and Voegelinians?

b. What aspects of China's Early Bronze age were unchanged from the situation during the preceding Late Neolithic stage? What was radically novel about the Middle and Late Bronze age from the differing perspectives of the archaeologists, Marxists, academics and Voegelinians?

A. From Upper Paleolithic Through Early Neolithic (25,000-3,000 BC)

1. China's late start

The prehistory of Homo sapiens in China started c. 25-30,000 BC, apparently much later than in western Eurasia. However, some recently discovered evidence suggests H. sapiens hit Spain as early as 1-200,000 BC and indirect evidence (from estimated rates of DNA mutation) suggests our crowd was perhaps in South China, heading north by the coastal route, as early as 60,000 BC.

These may have been the leading edge of the second wave of hominids that migrated north and then east out of southern and eastern Africa. The first wave of hominids to migrate, of the species Homo erectus (or its immediate predecessor), may have left Africa two million years ago, and reached Java c. 1.8 million BC, but only shows up in the fossil record of continental East Asia around 1.0 million BC. [2]

Sometime not long before 200,000 BC early H. sapiens presumably evolved out of H. erectus in southern Africa. According to the persuasive work of the amateur paleontologist Andres Betts, these early H. sapiens may have looked like undifferentiated Mongoloidals (roughly like east coast American Indians) and during their first 100,000 years made tools and campsites not unlike H. erectus, but they were making fancy fishing tools in Zaire by 80,000 BC. About that time they moved up into Palestine and then Western Europe where they eventually replaced the Neanderthals, a local European dead-end evolution out of H. erectus.

These anatomically correct H. sapiens did not change their archaic behavior until as late as 50,000 BC, thereby fooling modern paleontologists into taking their habitation sites for Neanderthal ones.

The West Eurasian H. sapiens only then finally spread past Eastern Europe, through western and southern Asia into southeast Asia with some of them heading north along the coast into North China, perhaps hitting the Beijing area around 30,000 BC.

The above account is now (for the moment, at least) replacing an earlier one which had H. sapiens appear at about the same time, c. 30,000 BC, all across Eurasia, evolving out of the local variety of H. erectus. Some physical similarities between populations of H. erectus and later H. sapiens in the same region are visible. In East Asia, for example, 90% of both species had shovel-shaped incisor teeth. Elsewhere such tooth shapes were rarer. (More recent surveys of the tooth repertoire indicate that the original Afrcan hominids also had roughly the same incidence of shovel-shaped incisors, which suggests that for some reason all but the Mongoloidal variants may have shed the gene making shovel-shaped incisors.)

The older theory suggested that all the H. sapiens races had evolved in parallel from local H. erectus races in the places where they are now found. That is, the Negroidals evolved from H. erectus in Africa, the Caucasoidals from West Eurasian H. erectus, and the Mongoloidals from H. erectus resident in East Asia. The above recent redatings and new discoveries render parallel evolution much less likely. The new evidence also has East Asia's development of an H. sapiens culture lagging behind West Eurasia by at least several dozen thousand more years than do earlier theories.

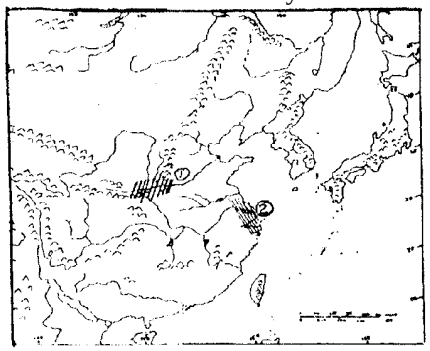
2. Zone B's dual transition into Beginning Neolithic c. 6,000 BC

This lag continued for some time. China's transition from the Upper Paleolithic (the stage achieved by the Western European H. sapiens after c. 30,000 BC) to the Beginning Neolithic was also later than the West's. It occurred c. 6,000 BC rather than c. 8,000 BC.

This last phase of the lag might be explained in two non-conflicting ways: by the lingering effects of the ice age on Zone B because of its nearness to the Tibetan highlands from which the main glaciers radiated, and/or by the loss of evidence for possibly earlier Neolithic activity in Zone C as the melting glaciers raised the sea over the continental shelf locations of any pre-6,000 BC Zone C Beginning Neolithic.

Though latecomers to farming, East Asians seem to have invented agriculture twice, and in slightly different forms. Once was in the fulcrum subzone of Zone B. The archaeologists call this the Yangshao culture, naming it after the modern village near where the culture's remains were first found. The second invention occurred in southern subzone C1 just outside modern Shanghai. Archaeologists call one local variant of this culture the Qingliangang culture, also after the modern place name.

These two cultures were quite different in some fundamental ways.



1. Yangshao core area. 2. Qingliangang culture

The Yangshao culture's people kept pigs and grew millet in dry fields created by slash-and-burn clearing. They lived in clusters of semi-subterranean houses. The foundations of these beehive-shaped huts were several feet below ground level, with

[1] 1st draft 9/94; 4th rev., 10/98, by Edward Kaplan.

[2] This summary rests somewhat shakily on a 1994 redating of the Java Man variant of H. erectus from 0.7 to 1.8-2 million years ago, and surmises from this that a more primitive version of H. erectus might have left Africa more than 2 million years ago.

a hearth in the middle of the rammed earth floor and a smokehole in the center of the conical roof. Bones from the many burials found within living areas affirm that these people were fully evolved Mongoloidals, much like modern Chinese.

The Qingliangang people lived in raised longhouses they crafted of wood using post and beam construction methods. They kept pigs too (everyone does in China), but they farmed rice, probably in naturally swampy fields rather than dry-field millet as did the Yangshao people. Little Qingliangang skeletal material has survived. Some surmise that these east coast people were hybrids of Zone C Polynesians and Zone B Mongoloidals.

The mythic testimony runs parallel to this archaeological evidence and also suggests two simultaneous but independent transitions into the Neolithic on the continental parts of East Asia.

Of course the myths are not literally reliable historical documents for most ancient times. They were first written down only in late antiquity. Still, they tell plausible stories created from the inside of Chinese culture.

For example, the myths speak of the reign of Shennong 神農 (whose name means "Spirit of Agriculture") as dating to 2737 BC. He does not seem to have invented agriculture, the existence of which the myths take for granted. Shennong's specialty was the collection and use of herbs for medical purposes. He had a hole in his belly through which he could observe the effects on himself of different herbs. Some of the myths make it plausible to associate him with the later stages of the Yangshao culture. His name makes sense in Chinese, supporting the surmise that he, like the Yangshao people radiating out from the fulcrum subzone, spoke a language ancestral to Chinese.

Fuxi 伏曦(trad. BC 2852) is depicted in the iconography of late antiquity as an alien creature, with the body of a man down to the waist, but from there on down having the form of a snake instead of legs. The myths associate Fuxi with town-building and carpentry, particularly the carpenter's square and the pair of compasses for drawing circles. The myths also credit him with inventing the Eight Trigrams and using them in the earliest of the numerical methods of prognostication. His name makes no clear sense in Chinese, suggesting the myth recorders were transliterating a name in a foreign language. His alien shape perhaps associates him with the alien culture of the coast. Carpentry skills would have been necessary to build the longhouses of the coastal Qingliangang collection of cultures.

Could Fuxi have been part of the complex of Zone C cultures linked to the Qingliangang, just as Shennong might be linked to the Yangshao culture? Possibly, though there can be no proof of this.

The latest (and hence least reliable) mythic account has Fuxi come after Shennong early in the 3rd millennium BC. This fits the archaeological evidence for two expanding cultures that eventually overlapped and to a degree fused.

3. 3,000 years of geographic expansion

The Yangshao and Qingliangang cultures had been expanding for nearly 3,000 years by the time to which the myths ascribe Shennong and Fuxi. The mythic and archaeological accounts both have the centuries following c. 3,000 BC witnessing the transition into the Late Neolithic Revolution.

By then the Yangshao culture had spread north and east from the fulcrum subzone, and then west into the southern part of subzone B1. Though regional and local variations show up in the areas into which it spread, the similarity between all these new territories and the basic pattern of the original Yangshao core is clear. Nor was there any change in the settlement pattern of isolated small villages or hamlets abandoned every few generations after the nearby land's fertility was used up by slash and burn cultivation.

The Qingliangang family of cultures also spread slowly, creeping up the coast from the Shanghai region, and eventually spreading into subzone B2. Its regional and local variations were even more pronounced.

Both cultures expanded without much changing their basic patterns of organization. Both comprised large numbers of similarly small villages or hamlets which had little or nothing to do with each other. The anthropologist Helmut Schoeck (*Envy,* 1969) suggests a simple but powerful mechanism that explains why this universal pattern shows up from the onset of the Beginning Neolithic to the eve of the Late Neolithic, not just in China but everywhere.

Schoeck suggests that our species is hard-wired to both express envy and to detect displays of envy by others. Once we detect envy, we instinctively tend to act to appease the envious person. If, for example, we have something he wants, we share it. Schoeck speculates that this instinctual pattern is what makes social life possible for our species of herd apes.

Unfortunately, the impulse to share so as to ward off envy gets in the way of political differentiation. Potential rulers are genetically inhibited from accumulating more wealth and power than their neighbors. As a community grows larger, the most would-be rulers can do is preserve their prestige as village "big men" by periodically redistributing the excess wealth they have accumulated. But such "potlatch" ceremonies limit the political power of their hosts. Potential rulers remain merely big men rather than evolving into chiefs or kings.

The size of the community is limited by the mathematically determined tendency for the number of our social contacts to go up not in linear fashion (1, 2, 3, 4, . . .) but in proportion to the *square* of the number of people with whom we interact (1, 2, 9, . . .). Once a community grows beyond a few hundred members, thousands of two-person relationships arise and envy-avoidance becomes too complicated to keep up. The path of least resistance is for a few dozen or more people to leave the hamlet and form another isolated community nearby.

Schoeck's thesis both satisfies Occam's Razor (do not assume anything more complex than you have to) and fits the archaeological data. It also is far more congruent with the ideational determinist perspective than with the other three views. The academic consensus might dismiss Schoeck as "simplistic," but that might just be a nasty way of conceding that his thesis satisfies Occam's Razor.

B. The Late Neolithic Revolution (3,000-2,000)

1. Signs of state-building

By the end of the 4th millennium, the two cultures had expanded to within commuting distance of each other along the B2-C1 border zone. Since both were

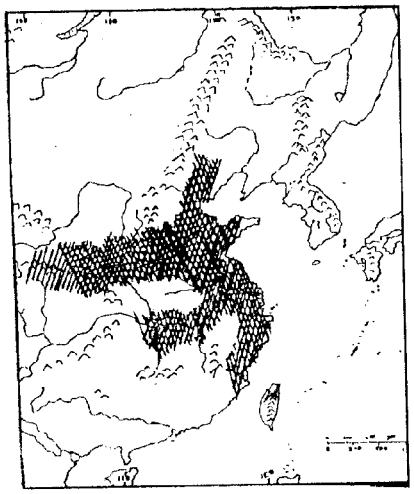
at approximately the same level of development, neither could expand at the expense of the other without either beginning to engage in warfare or statecraft to create some sort of larger kind of community which could with routine peaceability embrace several smaller communities of both types.

Probably both warfare and statecraft were employed. There are no signs of warfare in the archaeological record during 6,000-3,000 BC. People seem to have used weapons solely for hunting. It would have had to have been the first rulers who also invented warfare.

Shennong (from the Yangshao culture) and Fuxi (perhaps from the Qingliangang side of the cultural divide) may have been dim representations in the much later mythic literature of the differences between the two cultures when they first directly but still peacefully confronted each other during the first centuries of the 3rd millennium.

By around 3,000 BC sharp change finally begins to show up in the archaeological record. Small clusters of Yangshao villages in the border zone facing Qingliangang settlements began to share among themselves cemeteries located outside the villages' living areas. Specialists living in one of the linked villages began to make ceremonial pottery found in graves in cemeteries containing burials from all the villages in the neighborhood.

Within a century or two, a visibly new culture evolved at this conjunction of the two old cultures. It too linked groups of several villages, and spread back into both the Yangshao and Qingliangang regions.



The Longshanoid territory by c. 2000 BC

This archaeologists label this new culture the Longshanoid after the name of the modern village, Longshan, in western Shandong province, where they first excavated and identified new culture. The Longshanoid culture incorporated a number of traits from both the Yangshao and Qingliangang. It also added a number of new traits of its own, and so represented a sharp break from both of its predecessors.

Though the Longshanoid retained some old styles of pottery from its two progenitors, it added new manufacturing techniques. Pottery was fired at higher temperatures, made thinner and eventually on the potter's wheel rather than by coiling lengths of clay and smoothing the surface by hand.

Longhanoid agricultural tools became more specialized. It is possible that a simple plow was used in some sort of fallow field system which replaced the slash and burn and periodic abandonment of fields method of Yangshao. Perhaps both systems were used.

Signs of state-building show up sooner and more conspicuously than these material changes. What could have induced several neighboring villages to start sharing several cemeteries and a common ceremonial pottery even before the cultural mutation into the Longshanoid? Could it have been the formation for the first time of several extended families, each with a branch in each of the villages, but with each having its own cemetery? Why might that have happened?

Also early on, some graves are bigger and fancier than others. Human sacrifices soon accompany such burials. Ordinary graves still look much as they did during the preceding Yangshao period.

How else can we explain these novelties except in political terms? Those richer extended families reaching into several villages must have been branches of a ruling family and its in-laws. The fanciest burials must have been for chieftains of the numerous small, local states.

Later on, longhouses bigger than the ones Qingliangang built, and which were raised onto rammed earth platforms appear in some Longshanoid sites. More recent Pacific islands cultures house extended families in similar longhouses, each sublineage occupying its own apartment in the longhouse. Eventually, these Longshanoid longhouses become so big that it is impossible to avoid calling them "palaces," and their residents members of the royal lineage.

Even at the material level the pace of change was much quicker than previously. Compared to the 3,000 years of the Early Neolithic, it took less than a thousand years for regional variants of the Longshanoid Late Neolithic culture to not only spread over but to extend well beyond the entire territory of its two predecessors. The Longshanoid reached subzone A3 in the north, extended up the Yangzi valley to the west into B4 and south well into C2 and C3, and reached across nearly a hundred miles of salt water to the island of Taiwan.

This much larger territory seems to have been broken up into hundreds of culturally similar but politically separate local states, sometimes at war with each other but apparently peaceable within.

2. Slave Society or Early Civilization?

How to explain this delayed but then relatively sudden invention of state-building? Were these first states part of a Slave Society based on warfare? There is evidence for this. Yangshao villages seem to have been undefended.[3] Some Longshanoid villages had walls of rammed earth around them.

Weapons are buried with the male Longshanoid chieftains. During Yangshao, women, still (like men) buried inside villages, and sometimes accompanied by babies, sometimes had slightly fancier graves than men. This gives some (but not much) support for 19th and 20th century radical feminist speculation about a Beginning Neolithic "matriarchy."

Such graves are not numerous, however. By the beginning of Late Neolithic times they disappear altogether. Suddenly, fancy graves all have men in them. They contain stone and bone weapons better suited for warfare than hunting. The human sacrifices accompanying such burials might plausibly be identified as of prisoners of war. Much later, by the late 2nd millennium BC, that was the main source of humans for ritual sacrifices.

One Longshanoid village well of the mid-3rd millennium BC has skeletons of women and children as well as men in it, along with stone arrowheads stuck into some of them. This is the clearest evidence we have of Late Neolithic warfare.

[3] One Yangshao village seems to be encircled by a ditch, but that may have been to keep domestic animals in and/or wild animals out. We don't know much about Qingliangang village sites.

Warfare and the taking of prisoners could easily be interpreted as evidence of a Slave Society making war to take prisoners for use as slaves. The rulers could have used these slaves to work their fields before using some of them for human sacrifices in burial ceremonies.

The Longshanoid rulers also practiced scapulimancy. Carefully prepared scapulae (the shoulder bones of oxen) had holes drilled part way through them. Hot coals placed in these depressions produced cracks leading away from the holes. The direction of a crack constituted a yes or no answer to a question posed by the diviner.

A thousand years later, the late Shang Bronze Age kingdom just above the fulcrum subzone also used similarly flat bones (the belly shells of turtles) the same way. However, these later diviners sometimes wrote the questions and answers next to the holes and cracks they used to divine the answers. These Late Neolithic oracle bones were identical to the later Bronze Age ones except for the absence of writing on them. Shang's successor, the Zhou Dynasty, continued to consult oracle bones, but at a diminishing rate, Zhou preferring the yarrow stalks interpreted via the *Book of Changes.*

A Marxist might argue that like all religious practices, these were merely examples of the "false consciousness" invariably imposed on their subjects by the slave-holding rulers to keep the masses of slaves in line. Slavery, the Marxist asserts, must be the cause of the higher productivity and the greater wealth being grabbed by the Late Neolithic rulers. The newly devised pottery wheels, plows and fallow fields farming all must have contributed to the rulers' wealth and hence power. Thus sayeth the material determinist, with an amen from the academic consensus and some naive archaeologists.

3. The rule of the sage-kings

a. reinterpreting the material evidence

The ideational determinist looks at the same evidence, but reaches radically different conclusions from it. The evidence for major technological change is, he would argue, mostly indirect. For all we know, many material changes may only have come into use *after* the first states appeared.

What the material determinist takes for the stone blade of a plow without a moldboard may just be a hoe blade turned around. We do not have the wooden handles that would establish the tool's nature. Pictures or bronze models of such tools used as the blades of simple plows only date to the late 2nd millennium at the earliest, long after the first states.

Some novel objects—pots thrown on the wheel, for example—were made by specialists in what look to be the chieftains' home villages.

Perhaps, the ideational determinists argue, the chieftains came first and some or most of the new techniques came afterward. Religious changes that required the creation of scapulimancy to communicate with a Heaven separate from Earth perhaps also empowered the chieftains to attract specialists to produce goods for them and the newly-recognized gods they served.

What, asks the ideational determinist, could have happened on the spiritual level to bring about these changes? At this point the Marxist material determinist throws up his hands and storms out of the room mumbling something about "false consciousness."

The ideational determinist raises an eyebrow and regrets the debilitating effects on the Marxist induced by the poor fellow's "deformed consciousness." This mental deformity blinds the Marxist to the rich mythic literature of China which may well preserve at least parts of oral traditions extending back to Late Neolithic times. It also leaves him too imaginatively crippled to postulate a scenario for beginning state building based on ideas.

b. Yellow Emperor, Yao, Shun & state-building's beginnings

Let us consider the mythic culture heroes placed by the myths a bit later in the 3rd millennium BC than Shennong and Fuxi are supposed to have lived.

The key figure to come next in mythic time was Huang Di (黃帝 Yellow Emperor (or, Dead Ancestor Who Links His Live Descendants with Heaven), trad. 2697 BC). By that time, the archaeologists tell us, the evidence for state-building becomes ever more abundant..

The myths tell us that Yellow Emperor was the ancestor of all the later Chinese. By this they mean that all the later ruling families claimed descent from Huang Di or from members of Huang Di's court. Philosophers and politicians were citing these myths well into the 1st millennium BC to justify the legitimacy of ruling houses of that much later time. Yellow Emperor supposedly even invented the methods for recording family trees.

He also supposedly invented the calendar, which required him to invent astronomy too so he could coordinate the solar year with the lunar month.

His consort allegedly invented sericulture—the cultivation of silkworms and the spinning of the fibers from their cocoons into silk thread. Silk has always been a specialized product in China. Until some five-hundred years ago, ordinary people wore coarse linens made from hemp (cotton not yet being available). The rulers wore silk. Perhaps it is no coincidence that silkworm cocoons appear for the first time in northern Longshanoid sites along with the other evidence for the existence of rulers.

Did Yellow Emperor invent bronze? The myths are silent on that, leading the ideational determinist to surmise they are accurately refraining from associating bronze with the 3rd millennium BC.

The first sophisticated historian during antiquity, Sima Qian, who lived in the 2nd and 1st centuries BC, starts his history with Huang Di. He says that the historical archives are only accurate that far back. He gives the names of several of Yellow Emperor's descendants as historical figures too, including Yao (2356 BC) and Yao's successor Shun (2255 BC). Some modern scholars interpret these as names of century-long dynasties of the descendants of these latter two figures rather than as their abnormally long individual reigns.

Sima Qian describes the early rulers, from Yellow Emperor down through Yao, Shun and Yu, as sages (analogous to Old Testament ruling prophets). They understood the ways of Heaven, were themselves paragons of virtue and hence were beloved by the people over whom they ruled.

The totality of the evidence, mythic as well as archaeological, appears to support the ideational determinist perspective. Linking the appearance of rulers to the first clear visions of Heaven, is at least as plausible as the material determinist view, which links even the first rulers and the civilization they created to violence and enslavement.

Can we choose between the two explanations? Perhaps so. We can play out mentally a kind of political game theory scenario that pits rulers of the two sorts

against each other and estimates which is more likely to prevail.

Imagine a ruler defined in ideational determinist terms. He attracts his subjects by persuading them he is connected with Heaven and can link them with Heaven too. Perhaps he understands the significance for understanding Heaven of the movements of the objects discernible in the night sky. He understands how to use astronomy to create a calendar which can give the farmers both practical and sacred dates for performing their agricultural chores and ceremonials to the Earth deities carried over from earlier times.

A ruler like Huang Di can also offer protection against potential slave-takers lurking just over the horizon, i.e. from rulers defined in material determinist terms. All that he asks in return is some tribute goods—goods which set him above the rest of the people in symbolic as well as material terms.

Since he is linked to Heaven and does indeed ward off the slave-takers, no one begrudges him these goods. No one is envious of the beloved of the gods. In the words of Elman Service's *Origins of the State and Civilization* (1975), whose work in historical anthropology is congruent with Schoeck's pre-state anthropology, "unequal access to the gods yields unequal access to goods."

Sima Qian reports that when Huang Di went off to conquer the west, people in the east regretted his departure, and when he returned to the east, the westerners longed for his return. Why? Presumably because, in addition to putting them right with Heaven, he was protecting them from the material determinists' wicked slave-takers, who could not sincerely make the same claims to virtue.

Surely after some experience with slave-taking rulers, most people would spontaneously go over to a virtuous representer of Heaven, like Huang Di, just as Sima Qian's account states.

Indeed, they and Huang Di might well feel justified in enslaving the would-be enslavers after defeating them. They would leave every one else alone.

That would also fit the archaeological evidence, which suggests that most people still lived the same sort of lives in their Late Neolithic culture villages as their Beginning Neolithic ancestors did before the coming of the state. They were essentially free, merely owing the ruler tribute in kind and, during the off-season, labor and military service. By hereditary right they cultivated the same fields cultivated by their ancestors. They did not leave the land because it never occurred to them to do so, and because there was nowhere else for them to go to. The new Late Neolithic tools and techniques may have for a long time confined to the ruler's village, made only for him by specialists whom he fed and clothed via redistribution of tribute he received in food and cloth from everyone else.

Judging from much later arrangements, perhaps only prisoners of war were enslaved and perhaps used to cultivate the ruler's fields near the capital village. When the occasion called for it, some of these might have been sacrificed in the royal religion's ceremonials.

On points, at least, the ideational determinists would seem to have the more plausible perspective on the birth of the state in ancient China.

And the birth of the state was of crucial importance. Huang Di had, by creating the state, also broken the limits envy-avoidance sets on the size of the community. He had invented a new form of community—the state-community.

The state-community (state for short), unlike the Paleolithic hunter-gatherer band or Beginning Neolithic village, could in principle continue to grow in size indefinitely. To be sure, its expansion was always checked externally by the limits imposed by the technology at any given time and by the resistance of other states. Internally its limits are set by the current vision of Heaven, which determines how big a state can be modeled on that particular Heaven.

C. The Early & Middle Bronze Ages (2,000-1300 BC)

According to the myths, the state underwent its first significant change during the time of Shun (either the individual or the eponymous dynasty, trad. 2255-2205 BC). Shun was not at first directly related to Yao, but once he proved himself in Yao's service, he was given Yao's two daughters in marriage. Then Yao retired, died, and Shun succeeded to the throne.

The myth somewhat anachronistically treats this as justifying the meritocratic principle for selection of rulers, but this principle only became common in China during the 500 years after c. 700 BC.

If there is any truth to it at all, this story can better be interpreted in one of two ways. First, it might have been describing a shift to a different sublineage of the line connected to Huang Di—i.e. to a new dynasty. Second, it could also have been describing succession *within* a dynasty through a loose version of cross-cousin marriage (males of two sublineages marry the opposite sublineage's daughters, i.e. their cousins, when that is possible). This custom was common among later Malay states of Southeast Asia, a region linked to Zone C, from which early north Chinese states derived at least part of their culture.

The mythic account has a similar succession take place from Shun to Yu in 2205 BC. Yu carries out heroic works for Shun. Much later iconography depicts him carrying a spade with which to dig drainage ditches to get rid of the results of a great flood along the B2-C1 border.

This is a standard mythic plot line all over the world. (Note the generic resemblance to the Biblical story of Noah's great flood.)[4] This story may link Yu somewhat anachronistically to the much later spread of settlement into the swampy parts of subzone B2 so as to grow rice in naturally flooded fields. The Yu who lived in the 3rd millennium BC would not have been able to engage in much hydraulic engineering. That did not begin for another 1,500 years, c. 500 BC, when cheap iron tools finally became available.

According to the mythic narrative, Yu was also rewarded for his labors by marriage to the daughters of Shun and succession to the throne.

1. Xia: The first "dynasty"

The mythic account handles the succession from Yu quite differently. Yu's Chief Minister Yi apparently believed that the precedents of Shun's succession to Yao and Yu's to Shun, gave him the right of succession to Yu. When Yu died, Yi attempted to set up his own court. But, as Mencius retold the story in the 4th century BC, Yu's son Qi also set up a court after his father's death. Both aristocrats and commoners ignored Minister Yi, recognized that Heaven's Mandate had been

[4] Note that Noah did not end his great flood through digging drainage ditches, but rather was the recipient of the grace of God.

laid upon Qi, rallied to Qi's military levies, sent him tribute and attended his court for justice.

With this, the myth asserts, the hereditary dynasty of Xia was established, with sons succeeding fathers as the norm. It may be, however, that this was merely the first dynasty for which records survived into late antiquity in enough detail to illustrate the hereditary nature of its succession. It is also possible that Xia was merely the first dynasty to shift from cross-cousin marriage succession to some sort of father to son succession, though the latter is not incompatible with the former. The myths' suggestion that father to son succession was the pattern favored by Huang Di may be an anachronism.

Nevertheless, while still somewhat incomplete, ambiguous, and occasionally anachronistic, the mythic account of Xia does not overall strain our credulity.

The myth does not, for example, state or imply that Xia much used bronze. The only bronze objects it mentions are nine bronze tripods that Yu cast. These commemorated extension of the state's rule to the nine small "provinces" into which Xia divided the fulcrum subzone and the nearby recently conquered parts of subzones B1 and B2.

The myth's claim that bronze had only ceremonial functions is congruent with the archaeological evidence, which does not show more than a few small, crude pieces of bronze until well into Xia's successor, the Shang Dynasty.

The mythic tradition may also be accurately reflecting the chief novelty accompanying the creation of the Xia state—the achievement of a somewhat larger state than before. Nevertheless Xia was still only a large local or small territorial state.

(A local state may conveniently be defined as a state small enough for its boundaries to be visible from atop a fair sized hill at its center. Even a small territorial state is too extensive to pass this test.)

Even if not fully historical, the great flood part of the myth suggests that Xia was beginning to acquire marshy territory formerly under other local states just outside the fulcrum subzone in subzone B2.

The mythic tradition also seems accurate in asserting continuity, particularly religious continuity, between Xia and the other rulers of fulcrum subzone local states going back to Huang Di.

2. Shang: the second "dynasty"

a. early Shang

Shang was the second dynasty of the Xia type. It began, according to the most commonly used version of the mythic record, in 1766 BC. The archaeological dating places its founding at c. 1550 BC. One ancient source, the *Bamboo Annals* (a local state history written before the 4th century BC, buried in a tomb and dug up in the 4th century AD) appears to agree with the archaeological date.[5]

We read in the mythic record that the founder of the Shang Dynasty, Tang the Successful, belonged to a sublineage of the Xia royal clan. This sublineage budded off when the kings of Xia sent Tang's ancestors off to the east, to the borderlands between B2 and C1, near the modern city of Shangqiu. There they set up a border state allied to Xia.

After eighteen generations of hereditary kings of Xia, the myth says a bad ruler named Jie came to the Xia throne. In response, Tang the Successful marched out of this allied state in the east, overthrew his kinsman, Jie, and set up the new state of Shang. Tang built his new capital in the eastern part of the fulcrum subzone atop the burned out site of the last Xia capital. Either Tang or his successors subsequently lost full control of the east.

There followed a dozen kings of Shang who ruled in the fulcrum subzone from five capitals in succession over the course of the next couple of centuries.

We do not know why the capital was moved so often. Some speculate that the fallow field system was not yet in use after all, and agriculture still depended on slash and burn technique. It is also possible that the fallow system was not yet very efficient. Complex rivalries within the royal family may also have made it necessary to move the capital every few generations to have enough productive land under royal control within commuting distance of the capital. Perhaps the only way for the king to get out from under his aristocratic peers was to move the capital.

[5] Archaeological and mythic record dates don't converge until after 771 BC. This disjunction is an old problem, one already faced by Sima Qian, writing in 100 BC. But this two century gap between the modern archaeological dating and the most common mythic dating during late antiquity is close enough for ancient historians' work.

b. late Shang

King Pangeng (mythic date 1401 BC, but possibly as late as 1250) moved the capital north of the Yellow River for the first time. The new capital was set in the fulcrum subzone's northern extension, running along the eastern foothills of the Taihang Mountains, near the modern city of Anyang. There, on the site of the modern village of Xiaotun, Pangeng established the Great City Yin, and may even have changed the dynasty's name to Yin.

The mythic narrative's main factual outline for Shang is fully backed by the archaeological objects excavated at Xiaotun and elsewhere in Shang territory since the turn of this century. Several of the first five capitals of Shang have been discovered right where the mythic narrative says they were. What seems to be the first capital is on top of a layer of charcoal and another city's foundations. The latter may also be the site of the last Xia capital.

Since the late 1920s, much of Great City Yin has been excavated, revealing large palaces and temples. There are also enormous royal graves in the form of upside down pyramids excavated into the earth.

Large caches of oracle bones have turned up. These include ox scapulae of the sort used since the Late Neolithic. In addition, enormous numbers of plastrons (belly shells) of aquatic turtles seem to have been brought hundreds of miles from the southern or eastern coast. At Yin these exotic objects are found in pits which seem to have served as either archives or sacred disposal sites for divination bones..

Some of the scapulae and plastrons found at Anyang and dating to after 1200 BC have incised upon them the questions asked of and answers received from various divine entities, including the dead rulers of the dynasty.

No writing has so far been found on Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age oracle bones, but recently (according to a March 31, 1998 Reuters dispatch) two oracle bones bearing characters ancestral to later written Chinese have been found in Shandong and dated to c. 1500 BC, which makes them contemporaneous with the founding of Shang by a ruling house coming from the east (perhaps from NE Henan or SW Shandong). This new find is 300 years earlier than the previously known earliest writing on oracle bones. The vast number of post-1200 BC inscribed oracle bones come from the

northernmost part of the fulcrum subzone.

The names of all the kings of Shang and most of the kings of Xia given in the mythic record are also to be found in these oracle bone texts from Yin. This, along with the discovery of four of the six Shang capitals where the mythic record places them, would seem to confirm the essential facticity at least of the mythic accounts of Xia and Shang. By plausible extension backward, at least the general shape of the mythic narratives going back to Huang Di also seem plausible.

Large ceremonial bronze vessels appear for the first time at Yin, and in large numbers. The archaeologists talk about a transition from the Early to the Middle to the Late Bronze Age by the Yin stage.

Writing appears for the first time too, or at least writing in sentences, and not just on oracle bones. Short inscriptions are common on the bronzes, and what may be the names of royal artisans appear on other specialized products such as pottery.

Tombs are much bigger than before. They contain not just small numbers of human sacrifices, but whole companies of men arranged and equipped like soldiers. Platoons of chariots harnessed to small Central Asian horses and accompanied by infantry were buried at the perimeter of royal tombs.

This is the first appearance of the chariot in China, and it shows up in the Chinese archaeological record at least a thousand years later than roughly similar vehicles do in Western Asia. In recent years, burials (though without chariots) of Caucasoidal peoples dated to as early as 2,000 BC have been discovered in the southeastern part of subzone A1. They or people like them might have helped transmit the chariot from west to east.

c. late Shang's crisis of early civilization

Neither the mythic nor archaeological accounts explain why Pangeng moved the capital to Yin, but something drastically new was clearly going on. Whether the material changes were its cause or its effect we cannot yet tell. The ideational determinist perspective suggests that late Shang had outgrown its vision of Heaven and was undergoing a crisis of early civilization that could only be resolved by finding a vision of Heaven re-presentable onto Earth as a first stage of high civilization.

The mythic record alludes to an unspecified set of quarrels between King Pangeng and a number of aristocrats. Perhaps these quarrels partly involved relations with those Caucasoidals across the northern border and/or with nearby Chinese states, but that is pure surmise.

Perhaps the quarrels were domestic, and one or another of the various Shang factions reached out to the bringers of the new chariot technology for a new weapon to use in settling these domestic political quarrels.

The oracle bone writings describe repeated late Shang military campaigns to subdue peoples living within Zone B, but outside the fulcrum subzone, particularly to the east, but also to the west and northwest. The late Shang rulers seem to have been attempting to outgrow the limits of a large local state or small territorial state of the kind that had been evolving since Yu unified the nine provinces. They appear to have been trying to take over much of the northern half of Zone B.

Judging from the oracle bone inscriptions they were not succeeding. Even successful military campaigns out to the periphery had to be repeated, sometimes several times in a generation. Beyond a certain distance from the fulcrum subzone the local rulers could not be induced to volunteer to be coerced by the rulers of Shang.

The kings tried other ways to win the obedience of the periphery. King Wuding, the third monarch after Pangeng, married sixty-four women, more than any other Shang king, but most of his wives did not live in Great City Yin. Apparently Wuding married the daughters of local chieftains to win the allegiance of their fathers. But this workedno better than invasions. The wives stayed home with their fathers who remained as disobedient as before.

Wuding and his successors also tried taking hostages from the periphery. They brought the sons who were potential successors of local chieftains to Great City Yin to ensure the good behavior of their fathers. But all that did was teach Shang culture more effectively to these hostages, enabling them to assert their independence more effectively when they eventually returned home to rule.

3. Rise of pre-dynastic Zhou

One of the states of the periphery which sent hostages to Shang was the state of Zhou, to the west in B1. We know more about Zhou's mythic history than of Shang's because in the middle of the 11th century BC it conquered Shang. It took over much of Zone B during the next couple of centuries, and loosely ruled its local rulers as their feudal overlord right down to the middle of the 3rd century BC. By the 7th century BC, the mythic literature began to be written down and soon after was being commented on by philosophers and historians. So the myths I have been alluding to all through this chapter were the myths preserved by Zhou.

Naturally, the myths give the Zhou founders a connection with the court of Huang Di. The first of their line, Houji (Millet Spirit), was supposedly conceived when his mother, Jiangyuan, stepped into the toe-print of a deity in a field of millet grain. Appropriately enough, Houji became Huang Di's Minister of Agriculture.

After quarreling with some of the other ministers, Millet Spirit's descendants later abandoned the fulcrum subzone to live among the pastoral-nomads to the north. Eventually tiring of this, their descendants looped down through the Ordos (great bend of the Yellow River) region to the northern approaches of the Wei River valley. There they at last settled down, established a local state, and gradually assimilated Shang culture.

None of this mythic account is inherently implausible. The last stages of the above mythic story are archaeologically verified. Various pre-dynastic Zhou sites have been excavated near modern Xi'an city. The foundations of large buildings, big late Shang style bronze ceremonial vessels and even inscribed oracle bones have been excavated from the pre-dynastic Zhou capital. Materially, at least, the pre-dynastic Zhou state was a provincial variant on the late Shang pattern.

Their religion, however, was enough different from Shang's so that Zhou could re-present it onto Earth to do what Shang never could accomplish: organize a large, growing and yet stable state. The creation of the new kind of state also tripped off a linked set of changes in intellectual and economic life. Half a millennium later the consequences of these changes would help transform China from an early civilization, the stage through which it had been evolving since the Late Neolithic, into a first stage high civilization. **EHK**