



# THE SHANG DYNASTY

Ancient China 1600 BCE to 1046 BCE



An informative PowerPoint

## Who?

The Shang Dynasty was a time of rule under the Shang family in China from around 1600 BCE to 1046 BCE. Their empire reached far into the East China Sea, beyond the Yellow River. The Shang way of living and its traditions reached very far throughout China.

## Who ruled before?

Not much is known about who ruled before the Shang. There is a possibility that the Xia could have ruled but this is not definite. The only evidence of the Xia existing is from old Chinese history texts written over 2000 years ago.

India

China

Yellow  
River (Huang He)

Yuangzi  
River

area of Shang culture

Modern China

East  
China  
Sea

South  
China  
Sea



## **The First Shang King**

He was known as Tang, Tang Cheng or Tai Yi.

He realised that Jie, the last king of the Xia Dynasty had been mistreating his own people and was able to gain and gather supporters from 40 different kingdoms as a result of this.

After he came into power, the Shang maintained their place on the throne of ancient China for over 5 centuries.



## Shangdi

The king was believed to have a special connection with the dead royal ancestors, who would then contact the supreme god Shangdi.

This made the king the closest human being to a god. He would seek counsel from the gods a lot and make his important decisions from it.

The king had a lot to oversee in his land, including his armies and noblemen that he needed supported from.

# The Shang at War

The strength and size of a king's army was a very important indicator of the power and might of a dynasty. Their armies could be made up of between 3,000 to 5,000 troops. For the largest battles, the numbers could reach up to 13,000! The Shang had great, powerful armies that enabled them to rule for over 500 years through 17 kings.

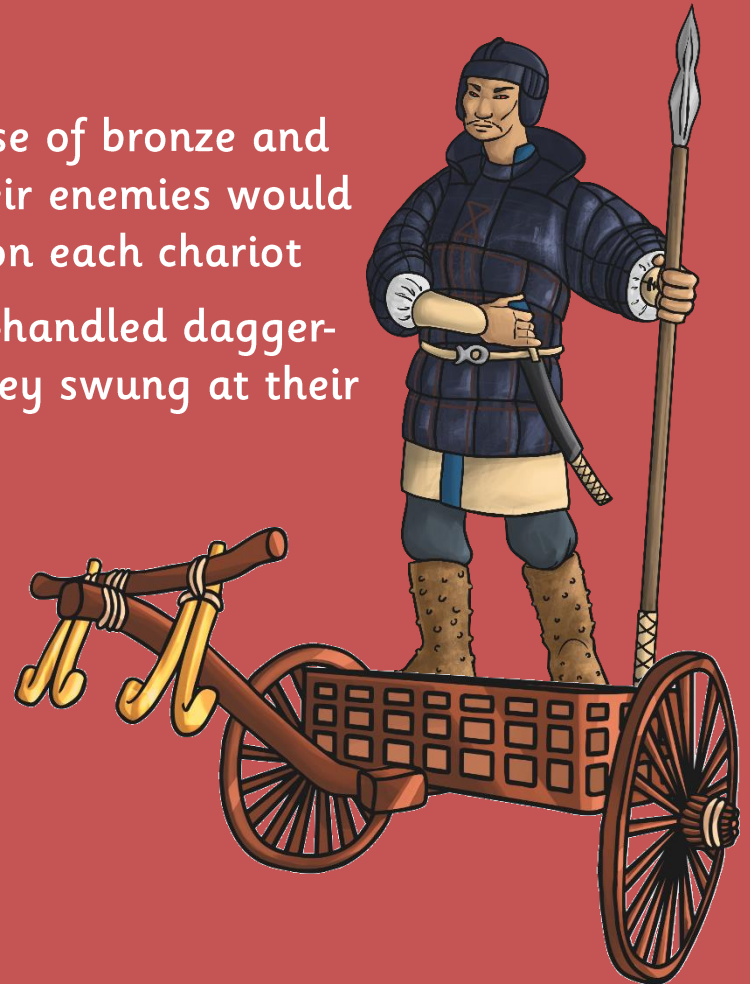
The biggest advantages of the Shang was their use of bronze and chariots. Chariots were faster than soldiers so their enemies would get tired quicker. They would attack with 3 men on each chariot

and hold long-handled dagger-axes which they swung at their enemies.



Above: An intricately forged dagger-axe head. Such a weapon was deadly!

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## War Spoils

The Shang took their profits of war in the form of prisoners, metals, food and livestock. The prisoners were then put to work for expanding the Shang's empire by building cities and monuments. Life was probably rather miserable and backbreaking for the working prisoners and some were even killed as sacrifices to the Shang gods!

# The Common Shang People

Most of the Shang people were ordinary peasants working in fields and living in hard conditions. Being situated by the Yellow River, the land was very rich and fertile.

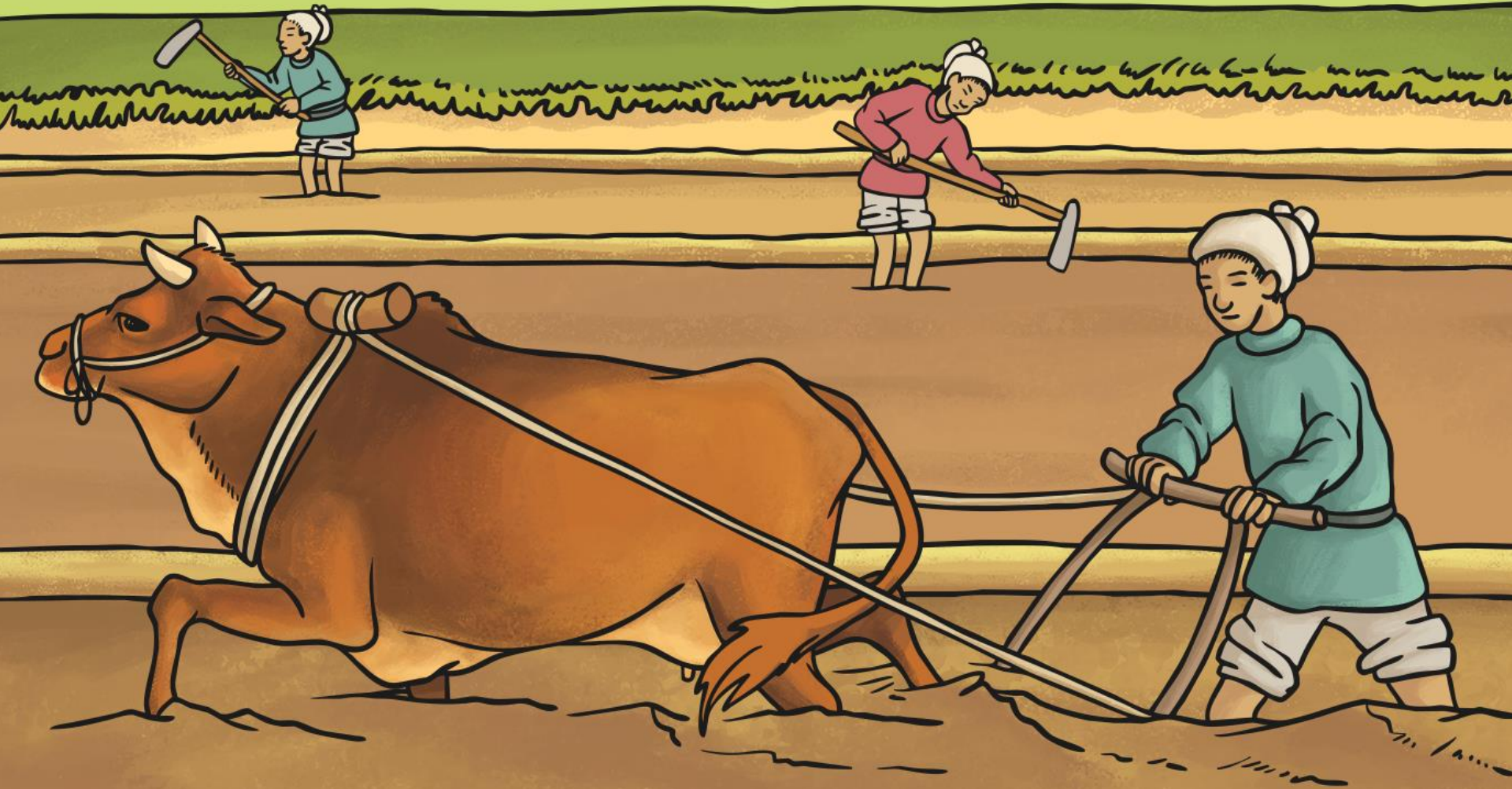
Whilst the rich lived contentedly, the Shang peasants would have lived in pits dug into the earth, covered by a very basic roof made out of material. They would return to their homes after a long, strenuous day at work in the fields.

The Shang grew mainly millet (below), rice and wheat.



# Ancient Techniques

Even in modern China, ancient farming techniques are still used and the scene below isn't so different from one in some parts of China today!

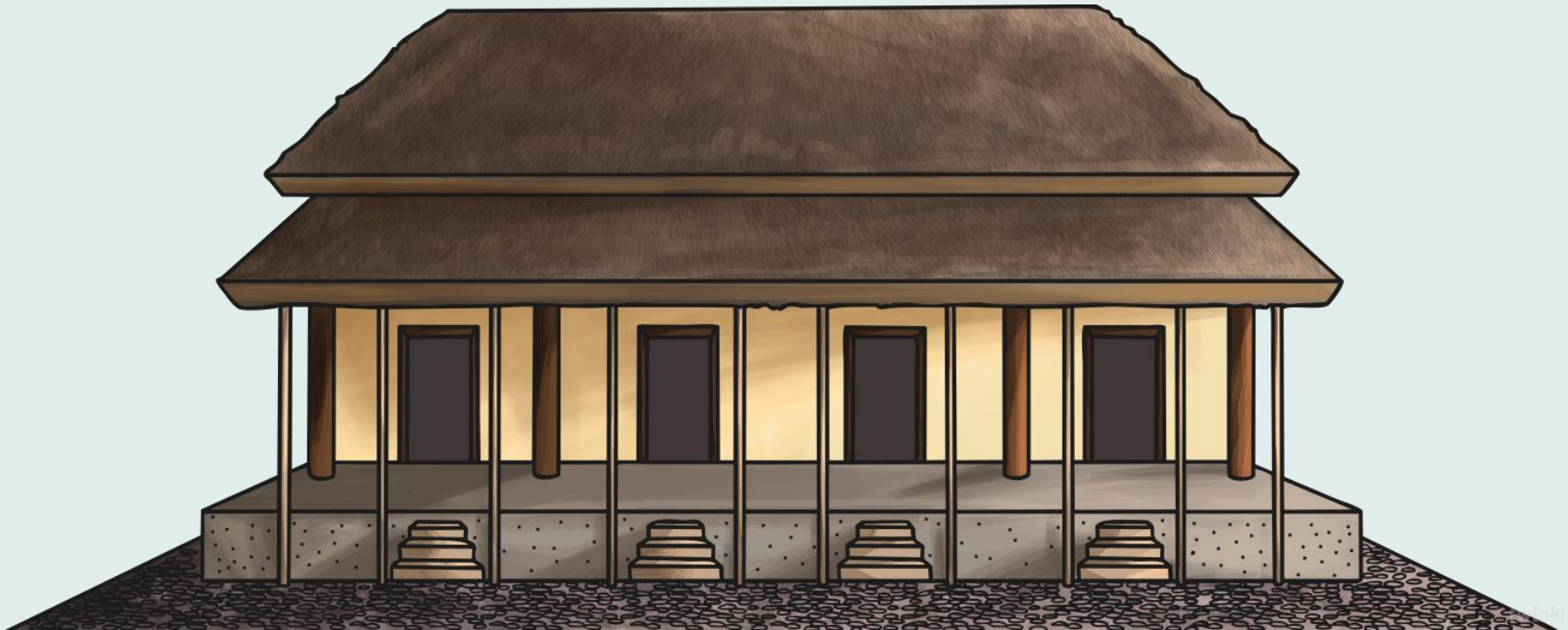


# Shang Buildings

Just like the people, very little is actually known about Shang buildings as not much has remained and we can only find evidence of its architecture under the ground.

The city of Shang was thought to have been built by the first Shang king, Tang. This city was surrounded by walls 10m tall and 20m in width! It is thought that it could have taken 18 years to complete by 10,000 workers!

Unlike the buildings from the Han Dynasty (second century BC), it is believed that the Shang had thatched roofs rather than tiled (below).



# Dragon Bones

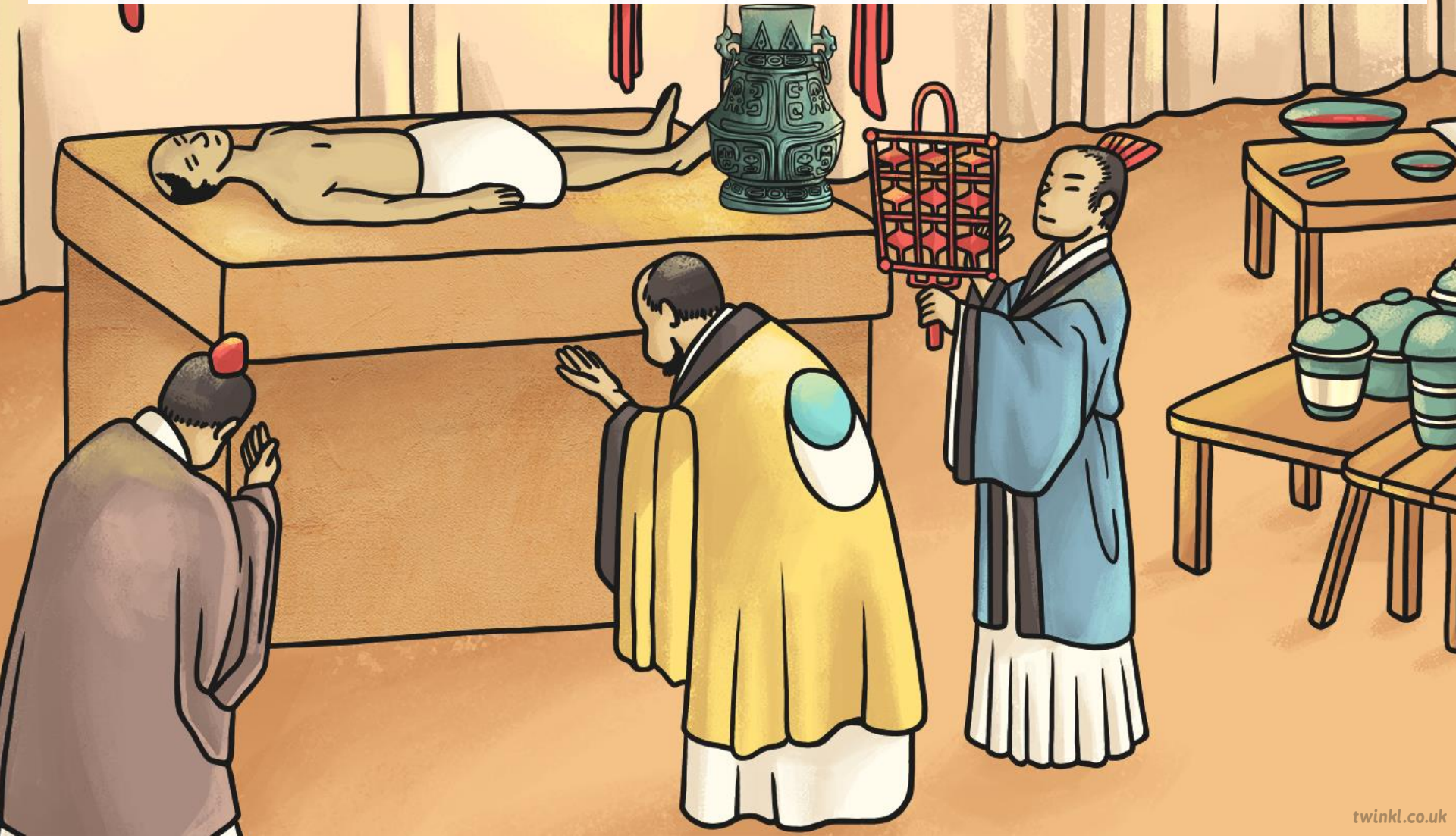
One of the many things found amongst Shang ruins were 'dragon bones'. These animal bones were found in Hsiao t'un, near Aanyang at the end of the nineteenth century. They were believed to have medicinal properties and sold by chemists to be put into special concoctions. The 'dragon bones' were then found to actually be the undershells of turtles and shoulder blades of cattle.

The bones are now known as oracle bones and they were used by Shang kings to predict important information, such as whether crops would fail that year. Questions would be inscribed onto them and the king would then ask his ancestors to provide him the answer through the bones. Special ceremonies were held for this to happen.



# A Shang Sacrifice

The Shang were great believers in sacrifice and ceremonies. These ceremonies were performed to keep their ancestors pleased, as they could not directly worship Shangdi himself. The ceremonies were believed to bring luck, rainfall or even children.



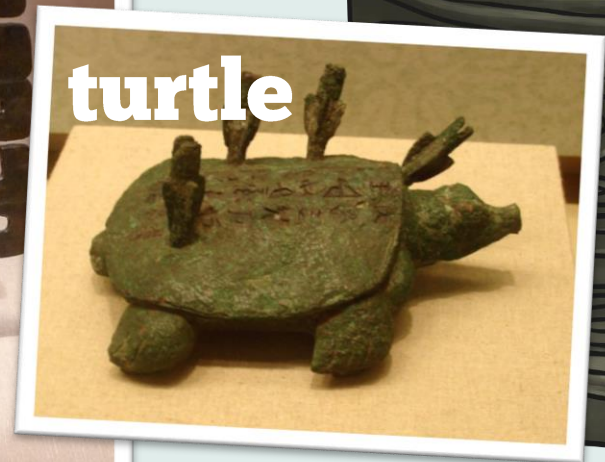
# Shang Art

The Shang worked with many materials to produce works of art. These included clay, jade, bone and bronze. White, glazed pottery was made for rituals and daily use. Jade was carved and used in jewellery and ornaments. They are most renowned for their intricate bronzework.



# Beautiful Shang Bronze

The Shang Dynasty is known as China's Bronze Age. The reason for this is the sheer skill they showed in making beautiful bronze art. The designs are so complicated that it easily sets the Shang people apart from other civilisations of the time, who used much simpler tools, such as flint and stone. Bronze was very valuable and difficult to find and produce in ancient China.



## Your task

This week you are going to be researching and ordering some key events chronologically on a time line.

Chronological order is a method of organization in which actions or events are shown in the order they occur or occurred in the past. This is a bit like the events of a story. The life or experiences of our main character start when they are young and end when they are a old or older.

The events that you must order have no date! Therefore you will need to research when each event happened and order them on a timeline.

To search for the key dates use question searched such as "When did Emperor Chang take control of the Shang Dynasty?"