

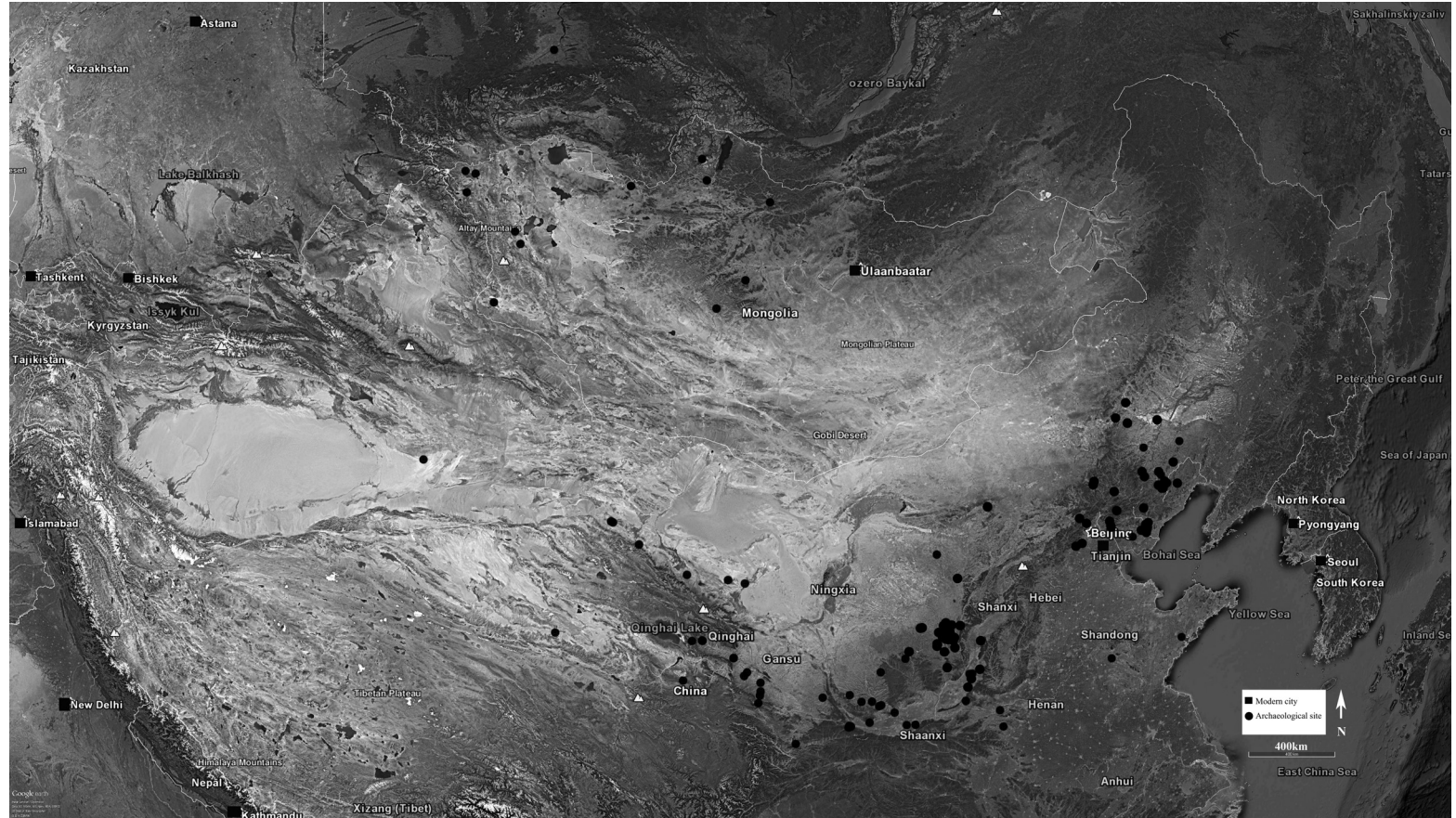
CHAPTER ONE

SHAPING THE STUDY OF INNER ASIAN ARTIFACTS AND MENTAL BOUNDARIES

Katheryn M. Linduff

THIS VOLUME IS ABOUT HOW ARTIFACTS WERE USED IN AN AREA variously called Inner Asia, eastern Eurasia, the *beifang*, or the Northern Zone/Corridor/Frontier. This area forms a vast extent of ecologically varied land that crosses modern national boundaries and embraces northern and northwestern China (Heilongjiang, Jilin, Liaoning, northern Hebei, Shanxi, Shaanxi, through Ningxia into southeastern Gansu, from which the ancient trade routes led west by way of the Hexi corridor to Xinjiang and eventually into Kazakhstan) and south central Mongolia to the Altai Mountains. It includes an area that was traversed from the vast steppes of Eurasia into dynastic China. Here it will be called the Inner Asian Frontier region (Map 1.1), a place that was permeable and accessible to many groups, multicentered and quite varied ecologically. It was neither entirely grassland nor rich agricultural land with clear borders or political limits. It was in some parts and in various ways in contact with the dynastic powers of the Central Plain of present-day China.

The steppe region of Asia is characterized by its physical openness, a prairie lying between the 40th and 50th parallels of latitude. The average altitude of this tract is between 500 and 1000 meters. It rises from the Hungarian plateau to the grasslands of southern Russia in the west and drops into the agricultural plains of central China in the east. No major mountain ranges fully obstruct passage across this great tract of land, although on the Inner Asian Frontier, the Pamir, Tianshan and Altai Mountains constrict the channel into Xinjiang and the



MAP. 1.1. Map of the Inner Asian Frontier: Zones of contact across all periods, including all sites listed in the chapters

Gansu Corridor of western China, and in the north across western Mongolia south to the Great Bend of the Yellow River. Northeastern China and the Russian Far East form the easternmost edge of that geographic continuum. This vast open area has been cast as fluid, open, borderless and unsuitable for sedentary village farmers. Ancient writers, and many modern ones as well, viewed the steppe as a no man's land, a place never hospitable for "civilized" habitation (Lattimore 1940). We know today, however, that its inhabitants led either or both mobile and sedentary lifeways, to varying degrees, depending on their particular locations.

We are interested in the intersection of peoples on the Inner Asian Frontier and how visual culture, especially bronze artifacts, was used to construct and mark mental boundaries during their regional Bronze Ages, or between about 3000 and 750 BCE. Our goal is to decipher the role that these artifacts played in life and death in a region that in other areas of the world has been described variously as a frontier (Parker and Rodseth 2005), a middle ground (White 1991), a contact zone (Pratt 1992), an arena of socio-economic-political competition (Dietler 1998) or a tribal zone (Ferguson and Whitehead 2005). The objects basically document places of intersection among peoples who often deliberately saw themselves as different from each other, as we shall see evidenced in displays of material culture. The Inner Asian Frontier was an arena where the dynastic Chinese, local peoples and groups who inhabited the steppe beyond intersected and sometimes vied for domination of each other, making the understanding of the dynamic nature of frontiers important to our goals. Interpretation of the artifacts follows their function in ritual behavior, and especially in death ritual, because most are found in burials. As burial items, they are the materialization of memory; we see them as a sign of current and future sociopolitical aspirations and of the construction of cultural and political identities. We consider them as artifacts in action, as markers of life and death in eastern Inner Asia.

We will concentrate on the ancient employment of metal artifacts, in part because of their high survival rate and abundance in the archaeological record, and in part because we think that they very often were used to display sociopolitical and ritual identity. Over time, their use changed to accommodate political, social and cultural affiliations. It is our contention that the display and behavior of visual culture, and particularly these metal artifacts, had the capacity to define groups and individuals in significant ways that were fluid and fluctuated over time within regional and local contexts. Unlike past scholarship, we hope to see the Inner Asian Frontier from the perspective of its own prehistory and history rather than only in reference to either the steppe (the mobile Eurasian pastoralists) or the sown (the agricultural dynastic Chinese). We will treat the artifacts as agents of cultural, political, personal and group definition and change. They were not merely look-alikes or knock-offs of a

core culture, as they have often been interpreted in the past, when they were defined by means of a canon that described them as representative of either steppic or Chinese aesthetics, styles and types. An understanding of their local function is sought here.

In the early 1990s, Bernard Herman made the useful distinction between studies that are *object-centered* and those that are *object-driven*. Object-centered studies are usually concerned with single or individual objects, often as they relate to technological advances and conceptual issues, or in terms of their aesthetic value. Object-driven studies, however, are interested in the object in context, and it is the interface between the object and context that allows us to determine the gist of their use. It is the second definition that we think best guides our analyses here.

In the past decades, the study of material culture of the archaeologically supplied sort we examine here has shifted from a documentary aim that exploits its evidentiary potential to a “dialectical and recursive relationship between persons and things,” that is, to the fact “that persons make and use things that the things make persons. Subjects and objects are indelibly linked” (Tilley et al. 2006: 4). This dialectical relationship encompasses not only social actors and artifacts but also institutions, spaces and imaginaries, thus assigning “things” an agentive role in the making of culture.

Here we link agency to action, intentionality and consciousness, all of which have frequently not been predicated on things. According to Gell, when “agency” is used to refer to things it shows them as actively having consequences in relation to people, insofar as they may alter their consciousness, systems of values and actions. As such, they are invested with some of the intentionality of their creators. Gell asserts that the significance of things lies not in what they mean in the world but in what they do (Gell 1998). Here we hope to discern what objects, or collections of them, do, especially in the construction of sociopolitical and personal identity.

This change in emphasis suggests that materiality is an integral dimension of culture and that there are elements of social existence that can only be partially understood without incorporating materiality (Delgado 2016). Again, one such dimension of great importance to ancient societies, we argue, is the construction of identity.

PAST SCHOLARSHIP

Stories of cultural contact and change have been structured by a pervasive dichotomy: absorption by the other or resistance to the other ... Yet what if identity is conceived not as [a] boundary to be maintained but as a nexus of relations and transactions actively engaging a subject? The story or stories of interaction must then be more complex, less linear and teleological. (Clifford 1988)

Modern literature on this region and its constellation of peoples, artifacts, lifeways and environments has been shaped around the steppe vs. sown model that was used to equate material evidence with either a sedentary agricultural lifeway and the Chinese, or a mobile herding lifeway of the steppe peoples. That outlook was certainly shaped by Confucian evaluative binary views of the “civilized” and the “barbarous” that were engendered for centuries in literature written as a guide to thinking. The composition of the Confucian canon has been subject to debate in and outside of China, and interpretations of this worldview changed through time, as did the cultural institutions modeled on it. Our goal is not to redefine the boundaries of Confucianism, but to highlight the reality that this way of thinking has been so influential in Chinese circles that it has created a uniform view across the time and space of history, and for our purposes, of the Inner Asian Frontier.

The notion of this historical opposition is also documented with the Greek ethnohistorian Herodotus when he wrote of the contrast between the Amazons and the Greeks (Book Four: chapters 2, 46, 61, and 62) and with the Chinese historian Sima Qian as he recorded the relationship between the Xiongnu and the Chinese of the second century BCE (Book Two). And, in 1940, Owen Lattimore echoed these sentiments and claimed that the gulf between the steppe and the sown would never be bridged and “’twas ever thus” (Lattimore 1940). This intellectual paradigm was set in motion centuries ago and held sway until the late twentieth century. The region studied in this volume is especially suited to examination of this issue since it abuts, stands between, borders, connects or embraces two great lifestyle traditions – the agricultural and the “nomadic” – or so modern and ancient authors have classified them.

Following this view, the diverse forms, iconography and function of objects produced in and for the mobile steppe and the sedentary dynastic peoples were thought to belong to a much larger body of material (styles) suited to ecological and geographic areas and the two distinctive lifestyles that could be documented there. Many have presented the material as a type or set, most often called the “Animal Style” (Rostovtzeff 1922; 1929; Jettmar 1967; Bunker et al. 1970) for the steppe style. Likewise, materials that displayed animal representations and were cast into items such as belt plaques and horse gear found on the Inner Asian Frontier were initially all labeled “Ordos” bronzes, taking the name from the area under the Great Bend of the Yellow River where Tian and Guo argued that the style originated (Tian and Guo 1986). Based on the observation that artifacts such as these were made over a very long period, long after some of their owners were living well within the political borders of the ancient Chinese states and might be assumed to have been assimilated into dynastic culture, they were thought to represent the presence of “alien” folks (Tian and Guo 1986). On the “Chinese” side, the models of that style were taken from the excavated materials from the royal cemetery of the Shang at Anyang.

On a closer look, however, we can see that environmental zones crossing the Inner Asian Frontier included open steppe, taiga steppe, forest steppe and desert and were further subdivided by mountains and rivers into smaller geographic areas. That variability affected not only economic adaptation, but also the desire for and the production and use of metal items. Both Bunker et al. (1997) and Shelach-Lavi (2009) argue that these terrains, ecologies and geographies could and probably did support varied economies and societal identities. Bunker goes further to suggest that regional adaptations – herding, hunting, fishing, cropping, etc. – are reflected in the material culture (Bunker 1997).

Varied ways of life have been documented archaeologically in Kazakhstan for the Iron Age (cf. Rosen et al. 2000; Chang et al. 2003) and within the Inner Asian Frontier during the second and early first millennium BCE (Linduff et al. 2002–4; Shelach-Lavi 2009; Indrisano and Linduff 2013). This archaeological fieldwork has shown that lifestyle practices ranged from seasonal mobile pastoralism and agro-pastoralism to full sedentism (Chang et al. 2003; Linduff et al. 2002–4; Frachetti 2008; Shelach-Lavi 2009; Indrisano and Linduff 2013) according to ecological, political, economic and other variables. Fortunately, most scholars working on the steppe have discredited the terms “nomadic” and “agricultural” as single meaningful terms for adaptation in the region and have sought more nuanced descriptive terms.

Other modern studies have taken Chinese historical texts as the starting point for study of the area (Barfield 1989; DiCosmo 2001), but without the specific aim of explaining the artifacts. Others have catalogued artifacts from the area according to archaeological cultures by type and region (Bunker et al. 1997; Linduff 1997: 18–98; So and Bunker 1995) and have prepared useful outlines, but have not considered the active role that artifacts took in shaping of local identities and circumstances. William Watson (1971) talked of cultural frontiers in a way that characterized regions by the artifacts that they produced. He, among others of his generation, was, however, also bound by the steppe vs. sown interpretive model. Still, these earlier studies were not really attempting to discuss the affective, performative or behavioral purpose of the artifacts. This book will attempt to explain just that.

The artifacts offer evidence of ritualized practice or use, as they were found in burial. And, along with inscriptions that appear on the materials dated to the late second and first millennia BCE (Chapters 3 and 4), the behavior of the artifacts from all periods of interest here offers additional clues to how their owners hoped to be perceived at death and perhaps even after.

Archeological studies published in Chinese on the material culture of the Inner Asian Frontier often begin with the identification of bronzes that were thought of as distinctive to the region. Tian Guangjin and Guo Suxin's research in the late 1980s was an important early attempt to establish typological and chronological categories of bronzes unique to the region, particularly to the

Ordos area in the second half of the first millennium BCE (Tian and Guo 1986). They coined the term the “Ordos Style” to describe bronzes discovered in the Ordos area under the Great Bend of the Yellow River and other regions on the Chinese frontier. At the same time, two other scholars, En Wu (1978, 1985, 2007, 2008) and Yun Lin (1980, 2003), also studied and identified diagnostic bronzes in the region and traced their morphological changes through time and space. Both scholars believed that the beginning of bronze metallurgy in the region could be traced back to the second half of the second millennium BCE, or equivalently to the Shang and early Western Zhou in the Central Plain, where they are preserved in the burials of the elite. They were not satisfied with using the “Ordos Style” to define bronzes discovered in the entire Chinese frontier area, and instead proposed a new term – “Northern Zone Bronze Complex.” Similarly to Tian and Guo’s research, however, their studies focused on the classification and stylistic development of diagnostic bronzes without much consideration of the archaeological contexts in which they were found. Wu, Lin, Tian and Guo all realized that studies of the northern frontier in China could not be isolated from materials from “the Steppe” and suggested stylistic analogues with bronzes from Siberia.

Their scholarship can be viewed as part of the intellectual environment of Chinese archaeology during the 1980s, when core–periphery cultural diffusion models were being challenged by the discovery of multiple local bronze casting traditions outside the Central Plain. Their efforts were meant to establish a distinctive and independent culture zone by singling out diagnostic bronzes that had little or no connection with those at the Central Plain. Their studies served to highlight the distinctive nature of the artifacts in the north, as opposed to those in dynastic centers.

Since their description of the “Northern Zone Bronze Complex,” archaeological investigations in the region have aimed to establish comprehensive archaeological sequences in subregions based primarily on formal stylistic analysis of bronzes and ceramics. Those studies, including new ones by Lin Yun, compared with earlier ones, have provided more nuanced chronologies of material culture. They recognized cultural diversity within the region, but emphasized local cultural continuities of the late Neolithic to the Bronze Age as distinct from dynastic centers. Recent studies represented by Yang Jianhua and Jiang Gang (Jiang and Yang 2008), for example, have discussed intraregional contacts within the Chinese frontier and ones between there and the Central Plain during the Shang and Zhou period. Most are cultural historical studies in which the aim is to describe the temporal and spatial evolution and distribution of artifacts and to outline their stylistic lineages. More recently, technical studies of metallurgy as well as the local environment have also been introduced into the investigation of bronze production and regional lifeways (Han and Ke 2007).

Since the decentralization of funding for archaeological work in the People's Republic of China in the early 1980s and the beginning of a more open policy toward scholarship and investigation of regions outside of the center of dynastic polities in the Central Plain, archaeology in China has become increasingly more regional in its focus, more accessible to foreign scholars and more widely discussed in terms of its significance within world history. However, even with the greater volume of international conferences, publications and collaborative field projects, the bulk of the literature being published, particularly primary field data, is in Chinese and therefore remains inaccessible to many foreign scholars, students and even specialists.

Moreover, many recent publications in English and other European languages that include interest and/or focus on artifacts and their interpretation are highly specialized according to location, period and methodological focus. For example, recent volumes on the history of Bronze Age Sichuan (Bagley 2001), the analysis of a single set of tomb shrines in Shandong (Liu et al. 2005), a study of artists during the early Empire (Barbieri-Low 2007), Shelach-Lavi's study of prehistoric societies on the northeastern frontiers of China (Shelach-Lavi 2009), and Catrin Kost's dissertation confined to plaques from the area (Kost 2014) have added much to the current understanding of early East Asian history and its visual culture. These volumes have provided systematic, detailed records and analyses of regions and their objects or makers.

Shelach-Lavi reviews the anthropological literature of identity formation and demonstrates, for instance, that the process of both local and regional identity formation is indebted to symbolic expression as an important catalyst of change (Shelach-Lavi 2009: 73–113). He goes on to discuss how to detect “ethnic-like” groups in the archaeological record, arguing, “the new definition which allows for much flexibility, internal variability and boundaries that are cross-cut with other identity groupings also makes the identification of ethnic-like groups much more complex ... the construction of identity is accompanied by, and to a certain degree accomplished through, the symbolic realm. Symbols not only indicate membership in the group and help demarcate its boundaries” (Shelach-Lavi 2009: 78). He confirms the wisdom of Wobst's cautions and questions – how are the symbols used and in what context? Who was the intended audience of such symbols? Who could, technically and socially, see and understand them? And, if certain symbols entail a certain identity, what are the antitheses that mark other identities (Wobst 1977; Shelach-Lavi 2009: 79)? And Shelach-Lavi reminds us that many types of identity such as gender or prestige may cut across the group signs (Shelach-Lavi 2009: 79) and that identity is frequently symbolized through the human body (Fisher and DiPaolo Loren 1992; Meskill 2000). With those questions there is little to quibble about, except the acceptance by Shelach-Lavi that the images and items created in the Inner Asian Frontier context are necessarily antithetical to another expression

or have a single counterpart. We shall argue, however, that image making is not always antithetical, as they claim, but rather can and does have complimentary, or perhaps simply different, connotations in any single context. That is, meaning comes from the beholder(s) and context and not the artifact itself alone.

Something must also be said about the secondary literature that addresses this frontier from its west, or from Russia or Kazakhstan. In most cases, the scholars acknowledge that the areas in which they work were part of a larger cultural area in antiquity that included regions within the current political boundaries of the People's Republic of China, but they, like their Chinese counterparts, are often constrained by language barriers. Evgenii Chernykh, for instance, has assembled and dated metal products chronologically through the Bronze and Iron Ages across Eurasia and has recently crossed the borders of present-day China, aware that the Russian easternmost boundary was not the ancient cultural border (Chernykh 1992). Likewise, Koryakova and Epimakov review the Bronze Age in Eurasia but they, too, stop at the borders of China while aware that contact to the east was regular and significant (Koryakova and Epimakov 2007).

Recently, Kovalev and Erdenebaatar have excavated local Afanasievo-like and other sites dated between the fourth and first millennia BCE in southern Mongolia that yielded materials analogous to metal products and perhaps production in northern China in the third millennium BCE (Kovalev and Erdenebaatar 2007; Kovalev 2014, 2015). These discoveries unlock a discussion about another route of contact to the south, or into lands peripheral to the emerging dynastic lands of the Erlitou culture or Shang. Mei Jianjun and Li Shuicheng are similarly engaged in a project that will review and generate more evidence of routes of contact into central China, but through Xinjiang and Gansu. Their contention is that the presence of Andronovo pottery in several early sites links that area to metal producing groups to the west while stimulating metal production in Xinjiang and Gansu. This route of transmission of metal technology eventually joins the Yellow River Basin, but their focus is primarily on Xinjiang and Gansu. For our purposes, documenting these multiple points of contact is important because we think it is interaction all across the Inner Asian Frontier that created a fluid and dynamic context that carried peoples, artifacts and ideas back and forth from this early period through the first millennium BCE.

Our discussion of the Inner Asian Frontier will, hopefully, shift scholarship from a China- or Steppe-centered to a multicentered regional perspective based on analysis of multiple locations. Naturally our view is affected by what is available in the archaeological record, and although locating and describing patterns of spatial order, disposition and display in tombs will be important, the singularity of sites will also guide our understanding. Scholarship that views

these Inner Asian Frontier peoples in the light of their own prehistory and that takes the archaeological documentation as the primary context of their local significance has just begun (Linduff 1997; Shelach-Lavi 2009). It is our hope that this angle of vision on the Inner Asian Frontier will produce a fresh view of how materials acted within the context of the lives of their users.

MATERIALIZATION OF IDENTITY IN METAL ON THE INNER ASIAN FRONTIER: ARTIFACTS IN ACTION

Human populations construct their cultures in interaction with one another, and not in isolation. (Wolf 1982)

Artifacts produced across the Inner Asian Frontier were markers of the process of increasing contact across the region. Bronze-using cultures there date from the period from about 3000 through the eighth century BCE and were contemporary with the emergence and establishment of the Erlitou culture and the dynastic societies of the Shang and Western Zhou. The Inner Asian Frontier stood beyond but adjacent to the early Yangshao, Longshan Neolithic and early dynastic heartland, and increasingly over the period of study here attempts were made to incorporate parts of it into the Shang and Zhou political systems. But the arrows of transmission went both ways, showing that some of the Inner Asian Frontier communities were ambitious and even aggressive about their land and property. From the early period, independent local groups across the Inner Asian Frontier were apparently intent on advancing their own interests, and we can see the emergence of increasingly more complex social differentiation that eventually included military units and economic programs that took them into lands that eventually became contested, especially by the dynastic Shang and Western Zhou. Simply said, why would the area have been so contested through history were it not valued on all sides?

Most primary evidence from this region is found in the excavated debris of burials and in inscriptions on bones or objects buried with the elite in dynastic centers. Such inscriptions looked north to document and explain their neighbors during the Shang (oracle bone inscriptions) or documented them as allies or opponents during the early Western Zhou (bronze inscriptions). The amount of excavated evidence from the Inner Asian Frontier has increased substantially over the past several decades. Most especially, we see the rise of metallurgy and the use of its products in burials as one of the main diagnostic features of the region. The desirability, production, function, style and numbers of metal artifacts changed dramatically and sometimes rapidly across the period of this study. We ponder their deliberate use and increasing variety over the period and argue that this occurred as a result of their utility in the negotiation of identity of several types as evidenced at the time of death. This application occurs on the Inner Asian Frontier, we also contend, because of the nature of

frontiers; allegiances, affiliations and group identity often changed quickly and always with significant consequences. Artifacts in these circumstances can and apparently did actively visualize groups as well as activate various desires or ambitions of the regional inhabitants.

In the earliest period, groups on the Inner Asian Frontier are distinguished by their probable autonomy and self-sufficiency, followed by the emergence of the dynastic centers in the Yellow River Basin during the second and first millennia BCE. During the later period, specific subareas were colonized, incorporated or subsumed into the dynastic system. Increasing levels of population in several areas signal intersection with and/or incursion of new peoples, which was documented in the selection and manipulation of material culture left behind in the archaeological record. On the eastern Inner Asian Frontier during the period from c. 1600 to c. 700 BCE, for instance, many peoples chose a variety of products to place in their tombs, but most often they did not follow the dynastic Shang and Zhou models unless or until they were colonized (Chapters 3 and 4). Furthermore, Bronze and Iron Age burial patterns and artifact iconography, styles and manner of display from the Lower and Upper Xiajadian archaeological cultures in the area, for instance, have shown that common types of locally produced pottery changed very slowly, if at all, while metal items increased both in production and in use over time (Shelach-Lavi 2009).

We cannot assume that archaeological cultures corresponded to self-conscious identity groups, as Shennan cautions (Shennan 1994), and many local cultures appear to have added selected metal items to their inventories while maintaining their local burial traditions and ceramic inventories, as has been documented by Shelach-Lavi (2009). Those metal items were especially noticeable because they were new and added to an already established set of funerary behaviors, and they were expensive to produce or procure, while access to them was restricted. If, as Wobst suggests, both expressive style and iconography of artifacts are commodities of information exchange and “variation in [signal] artifacts functions to transmit messages of one kind or another that facilitate social interaction, especially at intermediate social distances” (Wobst 1977), then these metal items acted as a social and cultural adhesive.

Because we are foregrounding the relationship between objects and people who use and witness them, another way of doing so is through network thinking (Knappett 2011: 4). Actor-network theory (ANT) has proposed a way to think about people in socio-material interactions with things and people on equal footing. This view suggests that relational approaches are most useful and that spatial patterning of social phenomenon is provided when one considers artifacts as evidence of human behavior (Knappett 2011: 33). ANT is clearly a complex theory that in intriguing ways may guide us to think of the groups on the Inner Asian Frontier as part of a micro-network, but so far it does not

convince us that networks *necessarily* allowed an agentive capacity to the objects that are the center of our study.

How we have conceptualized this region and thereby the use of metal items in burial will be the focus of subsequent discussion: on the nature of frontiers or contact zones; on the sociopolitical function of ritual behavior; on the materialization of group or individual memory and aspiration cast in metal; and on identity construction. In doing so, we acknowledge the active role that local societies played in shaping interaction and how identity negotiation and stress affected the agency of the artifacts as instruments of that negotiation. We will argue further that the role of visual culture in places characterized by shifting borderland/frontier politics and economics is crucial to their attainment of political goals. Additionally, we argue that artifacts were keyed to actual or fictive economic strategies and social networks, including those of individuals who supported such attempts for political gain.

Our attempts to interpret *artifacts in action* strike at the core of how to understand objects as visually potent actors in the context of human behavior. We believe, for instance, that they do not necessarily have inherent iconographic meaning, as previous studies have proposed, but that they act and behave at the behest of their patrons and users and take on significance to the beholders in certain contexts for particular reasons.

FRONTIERS OR CONTACT ZONES

We begin by seeing the Inner Asian Frontier as a “contact zone,” as Mary Louise Pratt has described (1992), and/or a “tribal zone,” as Ferguson and Whitehead (2005) proposed for other areas of the world. They see such places as ambiguous spaces that lay at the margins and borders of direct political control by the metropolitan states, where local and colonial ideas and practices were reconstructed transculturally (Ferguson and Whitehead 2005: xii). Such spaces can be seen as highly permeable, constantly breached and put into question by the symbiotic and mimetic processes that belie discourse of difference and distinction when in contact (Taussig 1995; Whitehead 1997a, 1997b; Ferguson and Whitehead 2005: xii). For instance, Ferguson and Whitehead explain that because material circumstances, patterned social interactions and structured ways of thinking are disrupted in countless ways by the process of culture contact, they are frequently recast into something unique for the region and time (Ferguson and Whitehead 2005: xii). We see this process at work in multiple “zones of contact” across the Inner Asian Frontier, and metallurgy and its products as an especially important sign of contact recorded particularly by the elites. The products of that technological knowledge were certainly a significant and advantageous addition to the inventories of burials, at least in part because they possessed the power of rarity and displayed

control of materials of manufacture and/or access to exceptional imported goods.

Parker defines areas like this as borderlands: “territories or regions around or between political or cultural entities – the geographic space in which frontiers and borders are likely to exist.” And further, he suggests that borders are “linear dividing lines fixed in a particular space”; that boundaries are “unspecific divides or separators that indicate the limits of various kinds”; and that frontiers are “loosely defined areas or transition zones that lie between political or administrative entities or between one such entity and a hinterland” (Parker 2006: 77–80). We have found that it is Parker’s definition that best describes the Inner Asian Frontier.

In addition and importantly, Parker stresses a conception of a border as being static and restrictive and a frontier as being porous and fluid, placing the two on a continuum in order to understand the nature of boundaries. Expanding on this basic model, he also introduces the notion of “boundary sets,” focusing on five groups of data, geographic, political, demographic, cultural and economic, and stressing the notion of borders and frontiers as being composed of multiple and overlapping sets of boundaries (Parker 2002, 2006). These boundary sets contain flexible subcategories composed of larger groups of data. For Parker, the geographic boundary set includes such subcategories as topographic features, physical characteristics, climate, flora and fauna and natural resources, and the political boundary set includes political, administrative and military information. The demographic set includes information about population density, groups of people, their health and gender differences among borderland populations. The cultural set includes subcategories such as linguistic, religious and material cultural boundaries, and the economic boundary set includes information about the extraction of raw materials, the transshipment of commodities, the manufacture of finished products and agricultural production. He proposes that larger boundary sets in turn can then be added to this model.

The value of Parker’s “Continuum of Boundary Dynamics” for this study lies in its ability to isolate and characterize boundary situations, allowing more systematic comparison of different types of boundaries and providing a platform for interdisciplinary and interregional discussion (Wallace 2011). And although in no case on the Inner Asian Frontier do we, or will we ever, have all these categories of data available, the model is useful as a guide for considering the place and role of our artifacts. As it is a sizeable frontier area, we must expect to locate multiple areas of contact and response, and not one that is united by political coherence either through colonization or local ambition. It was not until the emergence of the Xiongnu Empire in the second century BCE or later that we see that scale of political ambition in Inner Asia.

Although the Inner Asian Frontier and its material cultures have most often been viewed as offshoots of nearby state level societies, or cores of early

“civilizations” or “cultures,” as Scott explains for the independent groups in Southwest Yunnan (2009: ix–xiv), the peoples on the Inner Asian Frontier were physically dispersed in often rugged terrain. Their lifeway practices, including small-scale agriculture and pastoralism, as well as the terrain and ecosystem that they inhabited, enhanced mobility and even resisted political expansion or absorption. They exhibited pliable ethnic identities, as recorded in inscriptions on bronze objects, especially vessels (Chapters 3 and 4), and on oracle bones (Chapters 3 and 4). Additionally, they probably maintained a largely oral culture that allowed them to reinvent their histories and genealogies as they moved between and at the edges of states of other colonizing polities. Scott claims that frontier groups of southwest Yunnan kept themselves strategically “at an arm’s length from the state” (2009: x). These conditions, if they are indeed also true of our contact zone, and we believe they may be, bring increased significance to the use of material culture that was commissioned, displayed and worn, given in exchange and/or locally produced and ritually buried, an aspect not considered by Scott. Moreover, the life histories of certain objects, insofar as we can recreate them, may also play a key role in explaining their efficacy in the region across time (Hoskins 1998; Gosden and Marshall 1999).

Contacts among groups, especially in the earliest periods in our study area, were probably serendipitous and/or episodic, unless some strategic commodity such as copper or wool was sought. In this context, the artifacts used in mortuary settings were sometimes direct borrowings from dynastic metropolitan models, were oftentimes hybrids and/or were frequently distinctly different from anything known in the power centers. Some were either local types or ones that have been called “steppic” because their types and/or iconography were borrowed from places even further to the north and west or from adjacent regions of eastern Eurasia, including southern Siberia. Not only were the types, styles and iconography often hybrids or “foreign,” but also so were the tomb assemblages in which they were deposited and found. It is our contention that the patrons of these artifacts were sensitive to the process of contact and exchange and actively chose artifacts that might position them in relation to the circumstances. As such, the materials marked their vision of place and person and could create and present a symbol matrix that could mobilize support, legitimize rule and ostensibly bind people together. That is, the objects, whoever designed them, were chosen for a *purpose* and an *affective* value.

If the artifacts are seen as a means of collective and individual communication and exchange, each distinctive set would then become integral to the construction and definition of cultural, personal or other types of identity. It is this function that we hope to sort out and explicate from the late Neolithic, from about 3000 BCE, when metals began to be used, to the mid-eighth century BCE, or contemporary to the supposed Three Dynasties period of Chinese history (Erlitou [Xia ?], Shang and Western Zhou). Such materials were

activated at the will of the patrons and circumstances to mark political and occupational, as well as social and/or family units. By the end of the Western Zhou in the eighth century BCE, such considerable changes in political structure and cultural makeup of membership Zhou states and their periphery had emerged that this, in our view, constituted a setting so different from the earlier time that it would require yet another study.

ARTIFACTS AS CLASSIFICATORY ON THE INNER ASIAN FRONTIER

Questions about when and how premodern peoples created identities and corresponding images and objects for themselves have received a lot of research attention in anthropological, philosophical, archaeological, psychological, literary, cartographic and religious studies. For instance, like ancient historians, Nicola DiCosmo (2001) looked at the early dynastic Chinese and their neighbors to their north as “enemies”; Peter Wells (1999) studied the view of the Celts as “barbarians” held by the Romans; Ruth Mellinkoff (1993) claimed for the medieval period in Europe a construction of others as “outcasts”; and Poo (2005) discussed “monsters, strangers, and animal-like creatures” in Egypt, Mesopotamia and China as Kearney (2003) did for Europe. In defining such diverse “types” and their visualization, even in past history, they explicitly or implicitly affirm that this recognition arises through comparison and that it is through contrast that an “other” is defined (Wolf 1982). Such comparisons have resulted not only in demarcation of beings/groups in representational ways, but also in selection of material signifiers that distinguish the merit or contribution of one from that of another.

Visual evidence documents this process of identification of self, group, polity, sect etc. in pre-modern cultures (Abramson 2003; Bahrani 1996; Cifarelli 1998; Green 1997; Desmond 2003; Hallam and Street 2000; Poo 2005 and others). Modern authors agree that ideas and images of “us and them” are social constructs that therefore can be understood in the local context of sociopolitical, socioreligious and/or other histories. We begin this study with this assumption – and also assume that this process of differentiation results from contact between people and groups and that their association can be and has been documented in the archaeological record of artifacts and their burial contexts in our study area. Further, we also venture, as Wobst (1977) has argued, that visual display itself has the capacity to designate and classify, or as Cohen argues, that “(t)he symbols of community are mental constructs: they provide people with the means to make meaning” (1985: 19).

The process of differentiation, therefore, presupposes some sort of difference gained and maintained through interaction – of trade, movement of peoples and/or ideas – such that when and if differences diminished, the process would be called assimilation or integration (Matsumoto et al. 2012: 31). The interest in

creating difference and marking it with distinctive artifacts continued on the Inner Asian Frontier for a very long time, as late as the Han Dynasty, although the objective of differentiation is more deliberate in some periods than in others. Still, the nature of coexistence was dynamic and was characterized through a paradigm of difference from the very earliest written documents, even in the Shang (Chapter 4).

We have collected materials within the current political borders of China, Russia, Mongolia and Kazakhstan to attempt to capture a picture of the ancient setting. In doing so, we have also collected and insofar as possible will discuss materials and their inscriptions, should they bear them, that refer to sponsorship and peoples on the Inner Asian Frontier. In addition, most artifacts considered by us are made of metal, stemming from our conception that fashioned metal objects hold a signature position in these regional societies. Upon their initial use in the late fourth millennium BCE, whether utilitarian (knives) or ornamental (earrings, bracelets, etc.), metal objects were placed in the ritualized setting of burial. And, whatever their metallurgical composition, shape and/or locus of manufacture, metal artifacts were always rare, perhaps even exotic, and took on social, political and probably economic meaning in that context. As mentioned above, we assume no intrinsic meaning for them and instead search for associative purposes to explain them.

What the peoples of the Inner Asian Frontier region thought of the dynastic leadership and its constituents is not easy to reconstruct, naturally, lacking written records as they do. But as Peter Wells (1999) has claimed to give voice to the “barbarians”, we, too, will look at these borderlands not only in view of Chinese inscriptions from this early period, but also from other kinds of evidence that document their own prehistory. We will do this by analyzing the residue of the occupation of this area, where the overwhelming amount of data so far available is from mortuary settings. In that context, we will learn that this area was not uniformly in contact with the Central Plain to their south or other peoples to their east, west and north. Moreover, the peoples of the region did not constantly wander in search of pastures, as Sima Qian might have us believe has happened since historic times, but adapted variously across the area. Furthermore, groups probably acted independently, strategically and forcefully to present visual evidence tied to their own goals. One task we have set is to examine the extant evidence with the hopes of coming up with a rationale for the choice of artifacts that they so deliberately chose and left behind.

Just as significant is our recognition that this region has been studied primarily as a periphery to the emerging dynastic states (Liu 2004). In his fourth edition, Chang (1984) changed course to model transformation from prehistory and into the historic periods on what he called “interaction spheres.” Although he gave credit to cultures outside of the Yellow River basin for the development of state-level society in the Central Plain, his goal nonetheless was to tell the

story of the emergence of Chinese “civilization.” Following this model, Liu (2004) focuses on locating the arrows of transmission from the outside into the “core” as well. Thus, much attention has been given to determining what the Inner Asian Frontier contributed to dynastic formation (Guo 1995: 60–62) and less to the region for its own sake. History told from this core–periphery angle may in fact isolate “influences” or “contributions” from outside the core, but most often point the arrows of transmission toward the emerging dynastic center. Our goal is to try to determine the dynamics of communities in our region from their own core. Not only have we found that there are many cores, perhaps each with its own peripheries, but also that the social, economic and ritual processes that emerged on the Inner Asian Frontier probably sometimes had the goals of colonizing, resisting and asserting of local desires in their dealings with the outside, much as Hämäläinen (2008) has recognized among native American groups such as the Comanche. In other words, the communities or polities on the Inner Asian Frontier during this period were as likely as the groups in the Yellow River basin to have been affected by interaction with their neighbors and to have designed insignia accordingly, both to define themselves and to detach themselves from each other.

One of the most visible examples of this process is the famous change made by the King of Zhao in 307 BCE to uniform his soldiers in pants and on horseback, as did his local adversaries. The resistance of his local minister to this move and to the proposed loss of identity in doing so is well illustrated in the following quotation, as is the sentiment of the King that the change is strategic and opportunistic:

Official Cheng: “Dear Zhao King, if you adopt nomadic clothing and cavalry in battles with them, you will lose your Chinese identity!”

King Wuling: “There is no one way to rule the world, nor is there any need to copy the old to benefit my country.” – *Zhanguo Ce (Stratagems of the Warring States)* [475–221 BCE]

Of course, this record illustrates a period much later than that studied here, but the idea is the same – the visual is valued in matters of identity, and changes in it may be resisted because of that association, even though it may have been recommended for practical, strategic socioeconomic, sociopolitical and/or perhaps sociocultural purposes. In our study, this process will be assumed also to be at work in the selection of materials that represent one at death, and presumably in life.

The most robust discussion of the process of identity formation and the creation of mental boundaries on the eastern Inner Asian Frontier has been undertaken by Gideon Shelach-Lavi (2009), and it is in his study that one can find a review of the debates in the anthropological and historical literature about ways archaeologists have tried to understand social processes of identity

formation. He concludes that individual identity can be studied within the context of burials, since it is there that, whoever assembled the tomb, attempts were made to visualize some sort of message that had an audience and a purpose. That is, burials had both practical and symbolic objectives.

Thus, if the communities of the Inner Asian Frontier used and/or crafted metal artifacts as building blocks of their own ascendancy and displayed them in burial and perhaps other places not recorded or yet located in the archaeological record, then these artifacts are active participants in that process. That the assemblages also display similarity of form and function as well as placement in burials across the region suggests that there were customs commonly accepted. Difference in customs underscores the regional contingency of historical change, as Hämäläinen (2008) explains for variation within the Comanche nation, and must also explain dissimilar choices of artifacts. This notion results from our thinking about two things: (1) the eventuality of local ambition and (2) the part played by the visual in achieving that potential.

METHODS AND OBJECTIVES

By offering this understanding of a contact zone as a framework within which to explain the various materials discovered on the Inner Asian Frontier, we hope to stimulate a better informed way of explaining the production and expression of material culture there and perhaps elsewhere. Moreover, in such a large and dynamic area, subregions followed different trajectories, so another aim of our research is to sharpen distinctions among these areas. We argue that the negotiation of various sorts of identity is recorded in the burial debris and especially by the types and uses of the bronze artifacts themselves.

For instance, life on most frontiers was diverse and often dangerous, perhaps especially in prehistory. Many have proposed that violence and war were/are a by-product of the intersection between local or nonstate and dynastic colonial peoples and that violence in such places was not unusual as peoples contended for control – economic, political and cultural (Ferguson and Whitehead 2005: xii). The disruption caused by culture contact worsened levels of collective coherence and often erupted into resistance and rebellion, especially at the borders of intrusive states; or into wars carried out under the control or influence of state agents, such as ethnic soldiering; or into internecine conflict among nonstate peoples (Ferguson and Whitehead 2005: 18).

These conditions rendered former group emblems or items impotent or at least differently charged in the newly constituted political setting. Perhaps as a result, death on the frontier was often elaborately celebrated and recognized by its inhabitants as a time to mark victories, their distinctive lifestyle and/or other identities with artifacts that signified those attributes. In other words, burial practices were used to delineate difference; to define solidarity (cultural,

political or otherwise); to declare one's own identity; to construct ideas about status, gender or age; and/or to resist or substantiate tradition or change in places where cultural coherence was threatened (Appadurai 1996; Eller 1998; Tambiah 1996). That is, a classic ritual-type vessel such as a *fangding*, as well as the shape and disposition of all goods in burial Number 5 at Zhukaigou, Inner Mongolia (c. 1500 BCE), was used to denote affiliation as well as subjugation of the mid-Shang colonists who occupied the area. Nonetheless, resistance to the colonial power can also be found in the dogged persistence of other items (curved knives) and signs (naturalistic animal representations) that showed affiliation to another, perhaps confined or more amenable, local group (Linduff 1995). This sort of distinctive colonization did not, however, take place uniformly across the entire contact zone.

We consider artifacts as cultural documents that makers, viewers and many others invested with information about the peoples and regions where they were found, so that their political, economic, ideological and other meanings must also be identifiable within the context of history. Thus, we take pains to locate and analyze archaeological and historical patterns of their use so that the ritualized context of burial (including its artifacts and their disposition) can be seen as a mechanism for the shaping of beliefs, ideologies and identities or as a source of social power for those who participate in, control or create them, thus revealing a great deal about the given society and its dynamics (Kyriakidis 2007: 69–75; Linduff 2010). They can also be seen as a focal node of social networks or as a means of illuminating hopes and desires. Ritual and the materialization of belief have more recently been seen as an important and informative class of social action, or even as a social construction of the sacred (Morgan 2010). Others have studied the placement and distribution of artifacts in tombs as well as their visual countenance (see, e.g., Jørgenson 1988; Parker Pearson 1999; Flad 2002; Williams 2003; Shelach-Lavi 2009) and have brought to bear on their work nonarchaeological evidence, such as ethnohistorical accounts and historical texts, although none of these pieces of evidence is a straightforward account of historical events or beliefs. Settlement pattern analyses gathered from a large-scale pedestrian survey undertaken in the northeast of the region by the Chifeng International Archaeological Research Project (Linduff et al. 2002–04; CICARP 2003) will also be useful for looking at the northeast in all periods of this new study. As we consider the material contents of tombs on the Inner Asian Frontier and propose ways to understand and explain them within this sort of ritualized context, we will use all sorts of available evidence: written texts – inscriptions on bronzes and oracle bones as well as received texts; archaeological context and its contents; stylistic and iconographic analysis of objects.

This volume will make use of art-historical as well as anthropological and historical interpretive literature in an effort to refocus more strictly

art-historical (So and Bunker 1995; Bunker et al. 1997, Linduff 1997) or text-based approaches (Barfield 1989; Di Cosmo 2001). Our study provides (1) a more historical perspective that will appeal to readers who wish to know more about the particular region – how it changed over time, its location among other cultural systems, new knowledge of the region, and (2) a more anthropological perspective that makes use of existing cross-cultural data and theoretical literature (for instance, object biographies, agency theory, mortuary analysis). Following that analysis, we in turn reflect on the existing theoretical literature, material culture/art and historical interpretation. We believe that these objectives are equally important and the strength of this study. This should stimulate discussion of the process and impact of cultural encounters, still an ongoing human experience and social phenomenon.

We have cast a spotlight on use of bronze artifacts in this region, have set them at the center of an historical analysis, and suggest that the objects can be understood in the context of their use. This insistence on looking at particular historical and cultural locations will hopefully demonstrate their power in the realms of social and political practice, especially since the use of metals is so often restricted to ruling elites and their high-ranking supporting associates. The results of this interdisciplinary, multicentered view of history and artifacts will test the efficacy of the core–periphery and steppe vs. sown framework so often assumed to explain not only sociopolitical circumstances but also burial practice in this region. In addition, by shifting the burden of choice or agency to the tomb builders and/or occupants, we can explain the contents and disposition of tombs as part of a process of identity formation or other such issues at work on the frontier. Negotiations in any one sphere or location were not made in isolation, but in interaction with those in other spheres and locations. The result is a view that defies linear narratives of progression or change.

What is fascinating and sometimes mystifying is that in this region, whoever those much-debated peoples were who occupied it, a varied and eclectic set of artifactual models and aesthetics were inspired by several traditions – dynastic, steppic, hybrid and local and perhaps others. Although all change in visual arts would seem to be inspired by difference and borrowing, this view has not been afforded for material produced on the Inner Asian Frontier. We will argue that, dependent on their time and place of origin and use, such sets or groups of objects were used to display and probably promulgate a distinctive regional or subregional style that consequently offers a sense of community. For instance, certain metal artifact types such as curved knives and belt plaques were used in funerary settings for many centuries across the region and claim a distinguishing identity for groups and individuals, whether the patrons actually knew the origin of such object types or not.

We understand that, in these contact zones, identities rose and fell in the changing historical state of affairs – that is, they gained strength from those

above, as state agents tried to map peoples for purposes of rule (as in the designation of official ethnicities in the Qing and the People's Republic of China) and from below as brokers sought their own or their groups' advancement. Moreover, we recognize that distinctive systems of meaning affect how people perceive their situations and act on them and that group identity is often defined by attachment to common symbols, among the most potent of which are constructions of "our history" and "our team emblem."

Symbols, often manifest in material culture, of course mean many things to many people and are well suited to manipulation by all groups. We shall therefore not focus exclusively on leaders and how they symbolize their positions, often as self-aggrandizing entrepreneurs, but shall attempt to characterize and understand how local peoples make culturally calibrated propaganda against the demonized other and resist or internalize it, sometimes with ferocity. And, finally, as Cohen (1985) has so effectively pointed out, we shall attempt to remember throughout our analyses that "symbols" provide people with the means to make meaning.

TECHNOSCAPES, INDIVIDUALSCAPES, REGIONSCAPES AND LINEAGESCAPES

We have framed our discussions of artifacts and their uses in all chapters around four types of settings that we have named *technoscapes*, *lineagescapes*, *individualscapes* and *regionscapes*. Of course, as identity can be constructed at many levels and for many reasons, these "scapes" may simultaneously be recognized in a place or as engaged for an individual. For example, at least as early as the nineteenth to thirteenth centuries BCE, incipient use of small metal tools and personal ornaments is sporadically present at residential sites and tombs in several areas on the Inner Asian Frontier and form what we call *technoscapes* (after Appadurai 1996). Local experimentation with rudimentary bronze metallurgy is further suggested in a few locations by the discovery of stone molds and slag. Stylistic correspondences in metal types of such items as earrings or knives confirm the flow of information on metal technology and artistic styles across the frontier among loosely interconnected yet independent local communities. These technoscapes have been identified regionally, and as far as the evidence currently allows, they also appear to be located broadly around points of entry of the technology into present-day China, where metallurgy eventually becomes a significant industry. The places where such technology can be found suggest that there were at least two and probably three such inroads: from the west through Kazakhstan into Xinjiang to Gansu and Ningxia; from the northwest through south central Mongolia into Shaanxi and Shanxi, and perhaps Gansu; and in the northeast through north Asia into Liaoning, Inner Mongolia and further south. The archaeological cultures designated as parent

“cultures” for the technology include Afanasievo, Andronovo and Seima-Turbina, for instance, where incipient dates for metallurgy and archeological sequences for metallurgy have long been debated. The earliest evidence for metal use in burial shows little individuation, but rather experimentation with the technology that does eventually lead to unequal access to the products of this labor.

Individualscape refers to places where the primary use of metal objects for personal identity construction can be evidenced in burial. Here the types of metal objects chosen were limited and the use of them is individually driven and focused. In a sense, this is a continuation of the experimental use of metal objects by communities across the Inner Asian Frontier in the earlier period and reflects an increased interest in using them to define personal identities. Individuals were then capable of accumulating more metal objects than in early periods, but the types were largely confined to three categories – personal ornaments, tools and weapons.

Regionscape refers to the use of metal objects for the construction of emerging, shared and cohesive cultural identity at a regional level. Within a regionscape, communities across an area began to select the same types of metal objects for larger group identity construction. Those objects became the “common” material language of the emergent elite across the communities in the region and stimulated the formation of a shared regional cultural identity. The types of metal artifacts found were no longer limited to personal ornaments, tools and weapons, but included various vessels of Shang, Zhou or even local styles. Metal objects played an increasingly prominent role in burials to reflect wealth and status. The use of metal objects was no longer sporadic but more systematic, revealing a clear regional pattern. This does not necessarily or even frequently follow the typical designation by archaeologists of archaeological cultures defined by pottery types and styles.

Lineagescape refers to the use of written language inscriptions on bronze vessels for defined group self-identification. These lineages, whether marking fictive or actual families, were situated on the southern fringe of the Inner Asia Frontier with close geographic proximity to the Shang and Zhou political centers. They are located and explored in Chapters 3 and 4.

Taken together, the chapters review materials from all over the Inner Asian Frontier that date from about 3000 to 750 BCE and set out to situate and define meaningful patterns of visual expression. We treat an enormous geographic expanse and time depth – all in a region that never became foremost in power or control in the period of our study of Eastern Asia. This is a territory that was ruled variously across time; it was clearly valuable as a crossroads where many peoples intersected and mostly wanted to remain distinct. They used material objects, made of metal and especially bronze at this time, to mark their recognizably dogged independence. Our study respects that resolute desire to

self-identify and sees remnants of the process today in the same regions of the People's Republic of China, where we conducted our research for this book. There, foreign exotica and local invention compete and resolve daily and remind us that the intersection of peoples often results in the desire to re/define oneself.