

CESTA research anthology 2022

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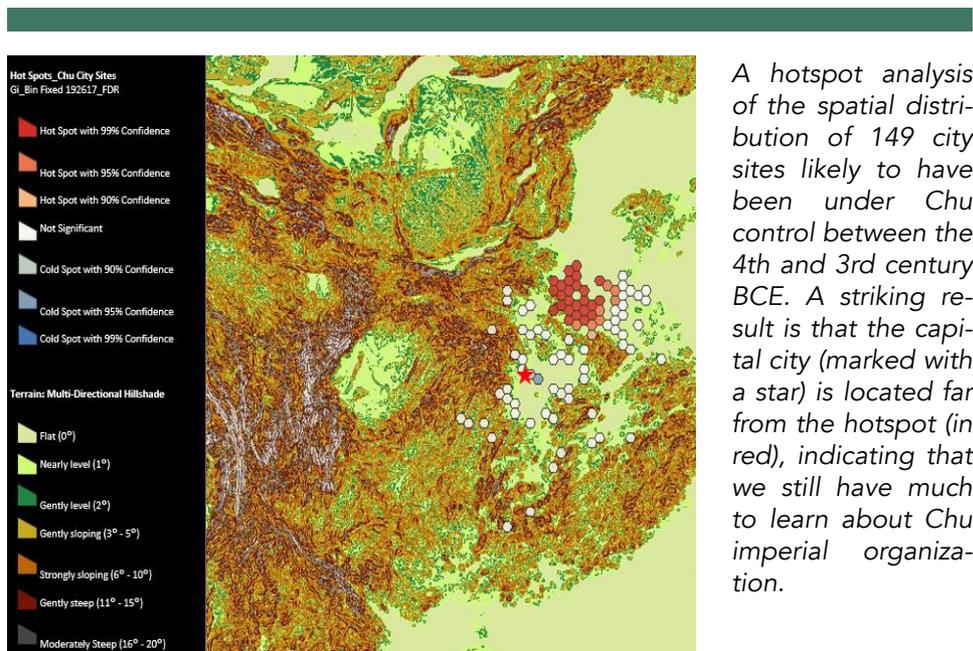
A Different Kind of Chinese Empire: The City Networks of Chu (c. 350 – c. 100 BCE)

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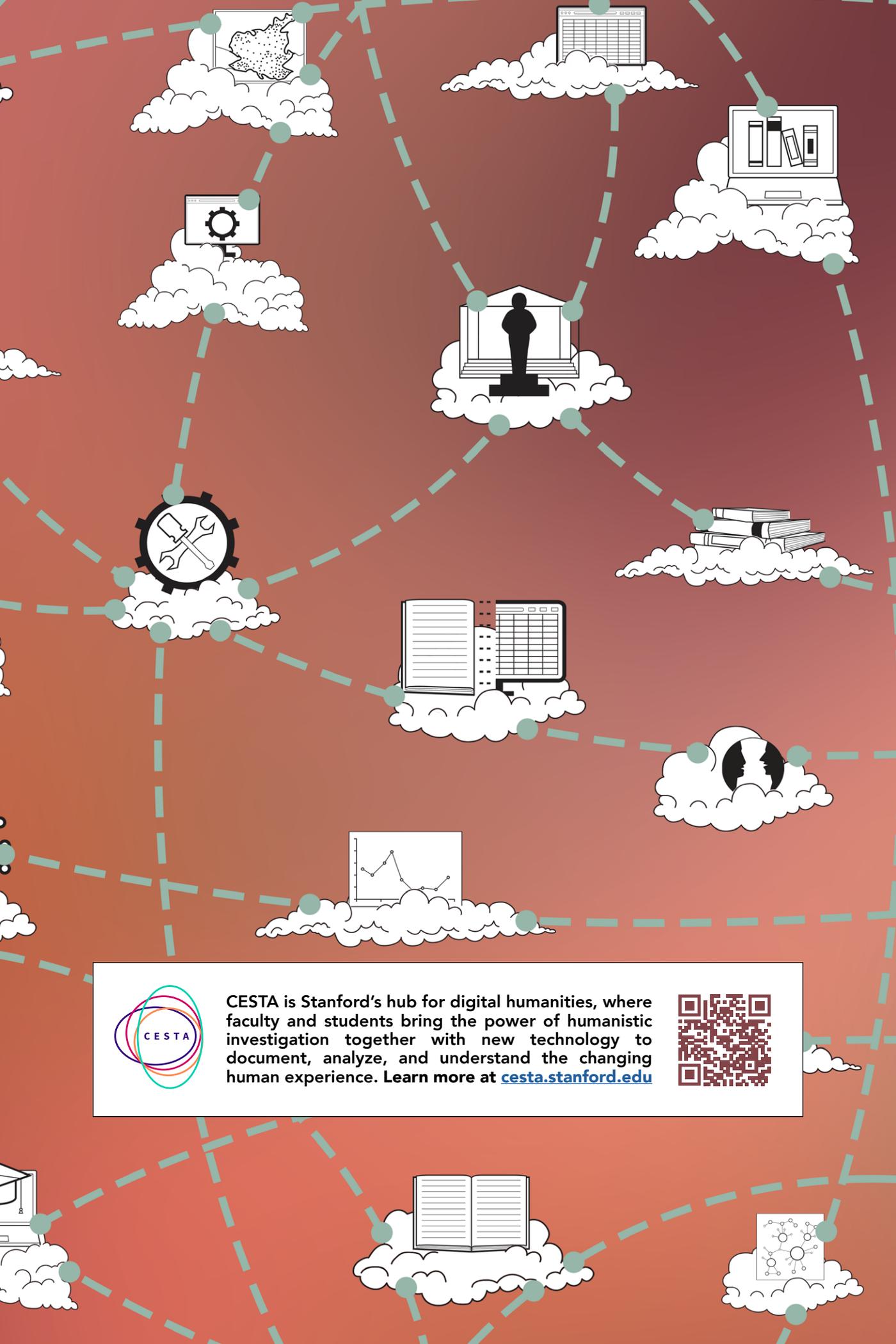
My overall research focus is on explaining the first wave of imperiogenesis in China from the mid-4th through the 2nd century BCE. For this digital humanities project, I explored the extended Chu city networks to understand how the Chu Empire operated on the ground. My dataset is the growing body of new archaeological data from South Central China, the consensual core territory of “Chu proper.” Empirically, this DH project consists of two parts.

Part one concentrates its attention on Jiangling, the capital region of Chu in modern Hubei, which was first conquered by Qin in 278 BCE and then by Han in 202 BCE. I collected data on 907 tombs (properly periodized) from 52 cemetery sites dispersed around the Chu capital and the Qin/Han administrative headquarters in Jiangling. Fuzzy cluster analysis in R of 5411 artifacts and artifact fragments from these tombs suggests that, following the Qin and Han conquests, this Chu capital region transformed from a highly stratified society, organized around the Chu king, to one that was governed directly by local bureaucrats working for Qin/Han.

Part two collects data on 149 city sites in South Central China that were most likely under Chu control between the 4th and 3rd century BCE. Hotspot analysis in ArcGIS of these cities’ spatial distribution suggests that, surprisingly, the hotspot with 99% confidence is not located around the Chu capital region in Jiangling but far away in the Central Plains in North China. The Jiangling Chu capital was, instead, located in a place not significant for the hotspot analysis. This counterintuitive result, which was first discovered by this project, reminds us that much still needs to be learned about Chu political and economic organization. These results have the potential to contribute to our understanding of imperial models which were different from the more familiar Qin and Han models.



A hotspot analysis of the spatial distribution of 149 city sites likely to have been under Chu control between the 4th and 3rd century BCE. A striking result is that the capital city (marked with a star) is located far from the hotspot (in red), indicating that we still have much to learn about Chu imperial organization.



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