

D. The Rise and Fall of Dynasties

1. Eventually, after Yu passed on power to his son, and their family was in power generation after generation, the Xia rulers became tyrants.
2. Why did they stop being benevolent despots? Because, as the Chinese know: *power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.*
3. Eventually the Chinese rebelled against them and chose a new leading family, the Shang, to take over the monarchy.
4. Eventually, the Shang dynasty, like the Xia before it, became tyrannical as well, and they were replaced by the Zhou dynasty.
5. The eventual collapse of the Zhou dynasty, and its replacement by the combined Qin and Han dynasties, who later fell, and then were replaced, in a fairly regular pattern, reinforced the Chinese belief that history moves in cycles.
6. The pattern that came to be expected was:
 - a) the establishment of a benevolent monarchy
 - b) gradual decline over many generations, due to corruption
 - c) tyranny
 - d) the rise of a challenging power, civil war and the overthrow of the tyranny
 - e) a period of disorder
 - f) the reestablishment of the monarchy by a new benevolent despot

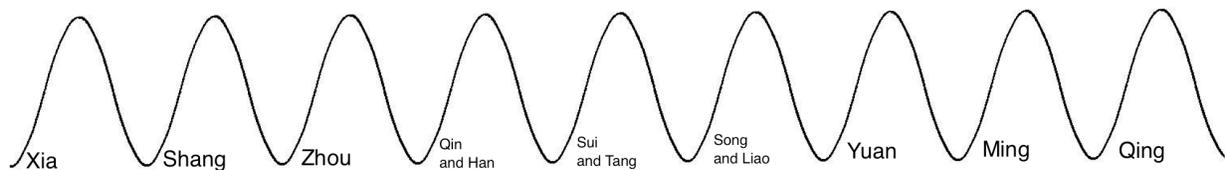
E. Confucius (c.551 BC)

1. To try to create more harmony and order, a famous Chinese thinker named Confucius (born **c.551 BC**) tried to create a set of rules to be taught to the rulers.
2. Confucius thought that rulers should try to act like a father to the nation (which he should view as his extended family).
3. The rules that rulers should follow were called the “five bonds of piety” (ways of acting to be good towards others).
4. Confucius also believed anyone could become a good ruler, as long as they were properly taught the rules for being a good person.

F. The Plethora of Dynasties

1. After the Zhou dynasty collapsed, the Qin dynasty replaced it.
2. Even though the Qin family only briefly ruled China as a single empire, they accomplished a lot, such as building the first sections of the “Great Wall of China.”
3. The emperor Qin Shi Huangdi also became especially famous for his massive tomb, which contains a huge army of terra-cotta warriors, designed to protect him in the afterlife.

4. The next dynasty was the Han. During their rule , the first round of ancient “globalization” occurred as trade flowed indirectly between the Roman Empire and China.
5. During this period, China started to see itself as being the "Middle Kingdom." To the north were barbarians; to the south, lesser kingdoms; to the east, the isolated island nation of Japan, to the west, Persia and Rome.
6. When the Han dynasty collapsed, China experienced another very “messy” period, and was again rebuilt by a new leading family this time called the Sui, followed soon by another family, the Tang.
7. It is clear that Chinese history was repeating itself according to the pattern of the "rise and fall of dynasties.”
8. Worrying about the names of every family and famous ruler will not help us to understand how China became what it is today. Since we don’t just want to learn about the past, we will skip over the separate dynasties, and turn to the key question: how did the China that was the same for *four thousand* years suddenly change into a new version of itself?



The pattern of the rise and fall of dynasties holds for *four thousand years* from the establishment of the Xia dynasty **c.2200 BC** all the way to the end of the last dynasty: the Qing dynasty. But why was there a *last* dynasty? Why isn't China governed as it was for so long?