

E. 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. The Shang also became tyrannical, 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, made the Chinese believe 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 challenger, civil war and the overthrow of the tyranny
 - e) a period of disorder
 - f) the rise of a new benevolent despot

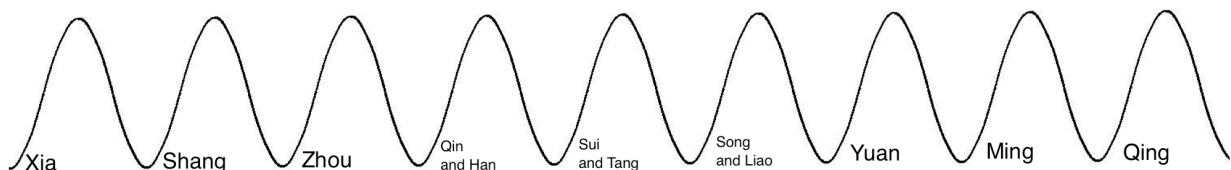
F. Confucius (c.551 BC)

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 held that anyone could learn the virtues necessary to become a ruler. Just as in the example of Shun giving power to Yu, Confucius believed that power could be passed on to anyone, and anyone could be a good ruler—not just a member of a royal family with supposedly royal blood—as long as they were properly taught the rules for being a good person.

G. 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 were very active and accomplished. The Qin are credited with building the first set of “great walls” along China’s northern border. Eventually these walls became connected in a network and they are now called the “Great Wall of China.”
3. Finally, though only briefly in power, emperor Qin Shi Huangdi has become especially famous, for his massive tomb, which contains a huge army of terra-cotta warriors, designed to protect him in the afterlife.

4. The first great Confucian dynasty in Chinese history, which became the model for later dynasties, was the Han Dynasty.
5. During Han times, the first round of ancient “globalization” occurred as trade flowed indirectly between the Roman Empire and China, as evidence of ancient Roman coins and goods in China confirms.
6. During this period, China started to see itself as being the center of a civilization. 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. China was in the “middle,” so its people came to think of China as the “Middle Kingdom.”
7. 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.
8. This short-lived and harsh dynasty was tasked with restoring order, and was followed by a long-lived Confucian dynasty ruled by the Tang family, and finally, after a long decline, a period of chaos.
9. It is clear that despite the presence of Confucian guidance for the rulers that the pattern of Chinese history was repeating itself, and it would continue to do so.
10. Since the pattern of Chinese is so regular, the most important thing to know about the pattern is the pattern itself.
11. 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?