



DACQ

Dynasty Academic Competition Questions

August 2007
Study Guide:
Chinese History

Chinese Dynasties

A note on terms: Many dynasties are divided into various segments (Eastern Zhou, Western Han, etc.) that are sometimes considered different dynasties. Most often, this nomenclature refers to the location of the Chinese capital at the time and quite often a corresponding national strength. For the purposes of this guide, dynasties have been grouped together with major divisions annotated.

<u>Dynasty</u>	<u>Description</u>
Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors (2852-2205 BCE)	This period was not a dynasty, and is not historical, but it is considered a key pre-history in most texts. Its events are entirely mythological. The Five Emperors are: the Yellow Emperor (ancestor of the Han ethnic group, whose historian Cangjie invented language), Zhuanxu, Ku, Yao, and Shun.
Xia (2070-1600 BCE)	Substantial debate exists as to the existence of this dynasty. Modern archeology suggests something existed during this time, though it is uncertain whether or not it was the Xia. It was founded by Yu the Great and marks the transition from divine mandate to dynastic rule.
Shang (1600-1046 BCE)	The first historical dynasty, most of the earliest Chinese characters appear on oracle bones from this period. The high god Di was worshiped, and the capital was at Yin.
Zhou (1122-256 BCE) Western Zhou Eastern Zhou Spring and Autumn Period Warring States Period	It was founded by King Wu after the battle of Muye, though its inception is more due to the Duke of Zhou , who organized the kingdom and oversaw the creation of the I Jing . The longest-lasting dynasty, it saw numerous important philosophers, including Confucius and Mencius (Confucianism), Laozi (Daoism), Mozi (Mohism), and Han Feizei (Legalism). Worship of Di shifts to Tian (“heaven”), and the concept of Mandate of Heaven began. Iron was introduced and a semi-feudal government existed. Sun Tzu published The Art of War and work on the Grand Canal was begun.
Qin (221-206 BCE)	It was the first imperial dynasty, established by Qin Shi Huangdi (“First Qin Emperor”). Numerous bureaucratic and cultural reforms were established, and Han Feizei’s Legalist philosophy rose to prominence. Construction of the Great Wall began. Li Si , Qin Shi Huang’s minister, was a key figure.

<p>Han (206 BCE-220 CE) Western Han Xin Dynasty Eastern Han</p>	<p>Founded by Emperor Gao of the Liu family, its greatest ruler was probably Wu Di, whose historian Sima Qian recorded the first major account of Chinese history. It lends its name to the primary ethnicity of China. Confucianism was state policy, and civil service exams were introduced. The Silk Road was established and a tribute system put in place. Important inventors included Cai Lun (paper) and Zheng Heng (numerous mechanical devices). Block printing was probably created. Wang Mang interrupted the Han and established the short-lived Xin dynasty. It ended with the rule of Xian during the Yellow Turban Rebellion.</p>
<p>Three Kingdoms (222-263 CE)</p>	<p>Famously documented in Luo Guanzhong's Romance of the Three Kingdoms, this era featured rule by the Wei, Shu, and Wu kingdoms. The period arose as the forces of Cao Cao (Wei), Liu Bei (Shu), and Sun Quan (Wu) vied for power following Zhang Jiao's Yellow Turban rebellion.</p>
<p>Jin Dynasty (265-420 CE) Western Jin Eastern Jin</p>	<p>This was a period of tremendous unrest. Its latter portion is known as the 16 Kingdoms.</p>
<p>Southern and Northern Dynasties (420-581 CE)</p>	<p>Bodhidharma arrived in China and founded Zen Buddhism. Buddhism became more popular in China.</p>
<p>Sui (581-619 CE)</p>	<p>Founded by Wen, this dynasty saw a series of invasions of Korea. The Grand Canal was completed.</p>
<p>Tang (619-907)</p>	<p>It was ruled by the Li family and founded under Gaozu. The golden age of Chinese culture, it is characterized by the poetry of masters like Tu Fu and Li Bai (Li Po). It was a period of substantial influence for court eunuchs, with a huge buildup of a standing army. There was a brief interruption when Empress Wu Zeitan founded the Second Zhou dynasty (only Empress to truly rule alone). It saw An Lushan's rebellion and famously had its capital at Chang'an. Christianity and Islam arrived in China. Chinese control of the Middle East was checked at the Battle of Talas. The Diamond Sutra was created.</p>
<p>Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms (907-960 CE)</p>	<p>It saw more turbulence. Kingdoms became extremely factional and vied for power.</p>
<p>Song Dynasty (960-1279 CE) Northern Song Southern Song</p>	<p>This dynasty was founded by Taizu. It is perhaps most famous for the conflict between reformists led by Wang Anshi and conservatives led by Sima Guang. It saw the establishment of a standing navy and the first use of paper money in history. Neo-Confucianism became popular and visual art gained prominence. Gunpowder was used in warfare. The Jinkang Incident occurred, in which Jin Jurchens kidnapped the emperor, dividing the dynasty into two portions. Song lost the Battle of Yamen to Kublai Khan.</p>

Yuan (1271-1368 CE)	China was unified under Mongol rule following victories of Kublai Khan . Though the Mongols undertook extensive improvement policies, they were always seen as outsiders and overthrown relatively soon after Kublai's death.
Ming (1368-1644 CE)	It was founded by the Hongwu emperor and was the last ethnically Han dynasty. Notable for its fine pottery, it saw the completion of the Great Wall . Under Emperor Yongle , the Forbidden City was constructed, and Grand Admiral Zheng He embarked upon a series of famous voyages, reaching the Eastern shores of Africa. This dynasty saw the explosive rise of commerce and interaction with the outside world (the Portuguese found Macau during this period). Wu Cheng-en published Journey to the West (Monkey).
Qing (1644-1911 CE)	Also known as the Manchu dynasty, it was founded by the great Jurchen warlord Nurhaci . It was solidified by Kangxi , who began a great dictionary project and feuded with the Christian Pope over missionaries in China. Religious conflict culminated in the Taiping Rebellion , led by failed scholar Hong Xiquan. The Opium Wars begin (the First Opium War was notably ended by Treaty of Nanking). Dowager Empress Cixi takes power, encouraging the Boxer Rebellion against westerners in China. Notable events include the Hundred Days' Reform . The abdication of Henry Pu-Yi during the conflicts between Yuan Shikai and Sun Yat-sen lead to the end of Imperial China.

Key Figures of Modern Chinese History:

Sun Yat-sen - Usually regarded by both PRC and Taiwan as the “father of modern China.” He transitioned China into a national state following the rule of **Yuan Shikai**. He is most famous for his “Three People’s Principles” (roughly summarized as nationalism, social welfare, and democratic government). He envisioned an industrial project that would eventually become the **Three Gorges Dam**.

Chiang Kai-shek - Sun Yat-sen’s successor and chief military commander. He took power over Wang Jingwei, was the leader of the Chinese Nationalists, and fought a lengthy civil war with **Mao Zedong**’s Communist forces.

Mao Zedong - First leader of the People’s Republic of China. He initiated the costly **Great Leap Forward**, an unsuccessful attempt at industrialization, whose failure may have led to the **Cultural Revolution**, a campaign to purge the bourgeoisie from China. He notably authored ***The Little Red Book***, often cited as the second most-printed book in the world behind the bible.

Gang of Four - A powerful group that was largely scapegoated for the Cultural Revolution and was removed from power following Mao’s death. It consisted of **Jiang Qing**, Mao’s wife, as well as Zhang Zhunqiao, Yao Wenyuan, and Wang Hongwen.