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The Xia Dynasty: Myth or Reality?

Exploring the Origins of Chinese Civilization



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China is home to four of the oldest civilizations on Earth. The "Peking Man," who lived 600,000 years ago in the Zhoukoudian region near Beijing, is the earliest human remains

ever discovered. In addition to being able to start a fire, the "Peking Man" could also walk straight and handle basic tools. The Xia



dynasty, which is believed to have existed from approximately 2070 BCE to 1600 BCE, was the earliest of numerous ancient Chinese ruling houses. It is debatable, though, whether this dynasty and its civilization actually exist. According to many scholars, the Xia dynasty was a semi-mythical period of reign that was created by the Zhou dynasty later on as an excuse to topple the Shang dynasty, who was said to have overthrown the Xia dynasty. It is asserted that the Zhou Dynasty created the Dynasty in order to rationalise the fall of the Shang Dynasty and normalise the consequences of the previous dynasty's displacement. Since the Dynasty served as a transitional period between the early stages of a more modern Chinese society and the old Chinese primordial civilization, it was important to Chinese history. Chinese legend states that 17 emperors dominated the Xia Dynasty for nearly 400 years. Yangcheng served as the original capital before moving to Yangdi. Some of its people lived in the northern and southern regions of Shanxi province, while others lived in the western region of Henan province.



Myth and legend surround the Xia Dynasty's origins, which are mostly documented in ancient texts such as the "Classic of History" (Shujing) and the "Records of the Grand Historian" (Shiji). The Xia Dynasty is said to have been founded by Yu the Great, a legendary figure known for his efforts in controlling water resources and averting floods, who also obtained the Mandate of Heaven, or the divine authority to reign. However, as there isn't any conclusive archaeological evidence linking Yu and the Xia Dynasty to specific historical events, several scholars have questioned its validity. After 45 years in power, Yu named his son Qi as his heir on his deathbed. When Qi was a small child, he lived through the big flood, and he was well-liked by many because of the account of how his father did not come home until the floods had ceased, and how well Qi handled his father's absence. Yu didn't want his son to take on the role of ruler, so he had planned to appoint his minister as his successor. However, Qi's popularity forced Yu to make an unpopular decision. Yu started the dynastic succession initiatives when he named Qi as his successor.

Tai Kang, the son of Qi, was a weak king, but many of his successors were quite skillful, and the later Xia are credited with many inventions and advancements, including the principles of chivalry in battle and the development of armour in warfare. Following Qi as the fourth monarch, the nation was revived by the great hero Shao Kang, whose legends are widely known. Under Kong Jia's (1789–1758 BCE) reign, the Xia Dynasty started to fall apart because he was more concerned with his powerful drink than with the duties of

governance. He was followed by Gao, who was followed by Fa; neither of them made significant contributions to bettering the lives of others outside of themselves.

The 17th and last emperor of the Xia Dynasty was Jie. Jie was considered a despot known for his brutality and foolish political actions. It is believed that his transgression was the reason behind the fall of the Dynasty. Sex, carelessness, and other



ostentatious excesses marred his reign. Jie was notorious for drinking excessive amounts of booze and acting strangely when he did. Jie alienated his people in addition to his despotic deeds, particularly after the assassinations of multiple ministers who supported patriotism. In the meantime, Tang Shang of the Shang Kingdom became more powerful. Shang's victories over Jie in multiple conflicts reduced Xi's power. At the Battle of Mingtiao, Shang beat Xi in the thirty-first year of Jie's rule. Jie was overthrown and fled after the fight, which helped the Shang Dynasty to flourish.

The first Shang Emperor deposed the Xia dynasty in 1600 BCE. The Shang dynasty is occasionally regarded as the earliest of China's dynasties because the Xia dynasty's existence is disputed. Chinese culture and inventions flourished during the roughly 600 years that the Shang dynasty ruled. This was a time of cultural and economic stability.



Writing was invented at this time, and many historians have since referred to it as a "Golden Age." The Shang dynasty came to an end when the Zhou ruler deposed the Shang king in 1046 BCE.

By the middle of the 20th century, there was some concrete proof of the Dynasty's existence. Evidence of a disastrous flood that occurred 4,000 years ago was discovered during an archaeological dig along the Yellow River valley in China. Given that the mythology of the Xia Dynasty began with a Yu who controlled the Yellow River flood, this verifies the legend's chronology. Many hints were gathered by a group of scientists from antiquated writings, artefacts, and skeletons found in cave shelters. Geologist Qinglong Wu detailed his research results in an article released in 2017, ten years after he began his studies. The Xia Dynasty's sociopolitical environment can be better understood through ancient Chinese texts, albeit their historical accuracy is debatable. These narratives are filled with embellishments and mythological aspects that make it difficult to distinguish between fact and fiction. Regardless of the historical accuracy, the Xia Dynasty's cultural and ideological legacies are reflected in the ongoing significance of characters like Yu the Great and the moral lessons ascribed to the sage-kings.

The Xia Dynasty, whether a historical fact or a mythological figure, continues to be a significant part of Chinese history and symbolises the ongoing effort to solve the riddles of the past.