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Chinese History 101

All historians agree that China has a long history. But they cannot agree on how long that history is. Some say it is 5,000 years. Others say it is 3,000 years. Their difference in opinion results from a dispute over the actual existence of several mythical figures.



According to local legends, about 5,000 years ago, there was a brutal, ruthless tribal chief called Chi You. Chi You was said to look like a beast. He had an iron neck and a bronze head. He ate nothing but stones and pebbles. Chi You was very violent. He liked to wage wars against neighboring tribes. Since he was the first to use metal weapons in warfare, his troops had never suffered a loss. Chi You grew more and more aggressive over time; finally, Yellow Emperor (or "Huang Di" in Chinese), another tribal chief, decided to build an alliance and get rid of him once and for all. A big war broke out. Miraculously, Yellow Emperor won. He became the lord overseeing all tribes.

Under Yellow Emperor's command, people lived a peaceful and happy life. His wife was said to be the first to raise silk worms. She taught people how to retrieve silk from silk worms' cocoons. She taught them how to use silk to weave clothes. Because of Yellow Emperor's many great accomplishments, all Chinese consider themselves the descendants of Yellow Emperor.

After Yellow Emperor passed away, tribes continued the custom of selecting the smartest and the strongest tribal chief to be their new lord. But things took a different turn around 21st century B.C.

A very talented man called Yu was appointed by Shun, the lord at the time, to tame floods in the Yellow River. He spent 13 years doing this. Though Yu encountered many obstacles and nearly lost his life on several occasions, he never gave up. After numerous failures, he finally succeeded by building riverbanks and excavating waterways. Shun was very pleased with Yu's work. He was also very impressed by Yu's determination and intelligence. Before he died, Shun named Yu as his successor.

Yu was a fair lord. But he revoked the tradition. Instead of passing his power to the next best tribal chief, he gave it to his son. This transition of power -- from father to son or to members of the same family line -- marked the beginning of China's first dynasty, Xia. The Xia dynasty lasted about 500 years. It had 17 kings from 14 generations.

Chi You, Yellow Emperor, Shun, Yu, and the Xia dynasty were all legends. Though they were mentioned repeatedly in historical texts, archaeologists have yet to unearth enough evidence to support the claim. Thus, for historians who were dubious about this part of the history, they regard Shang, not Xia, as China's first dynasty (16th century B.C. - 11th century B.C.) In this school of thought, China has 3,000 years of history.

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Though there is much controversy about the first Chinese dynasty, there is none about the last. Dr. Sun Yat-sen (1866 - 1925) led a revolution in 1911 and overthrew the Qing dynasty (1644 - 1911.) He established the first republic in Chinese history. Dr. Sun Yat-sen helped modernize China and introduced the idea of democracy and freedom to his fellow citizens. He is hailed as the "Father of Modern China."

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Questions

- _____ 1. From whom did Yu get the power?
 - A. Yao
 - B. Shun
 - C. Chi You
 - D. Yellow Emperor
- _____ 2. All historians agree that Qing was China's first dynasty.
 - A. true
 - B. false
- _____ 3. Who established the Xia dynasty?
 - A. Yellow Emperor
 - B. Shun
 - C. Chi You
 - D. Yu
- _____ 4. A dynasty is a succession of rulers from the same family line.
 - A. false
 - B. true
- _____ 5. If we don't count Xia as China's first dynasty, how long is Chinese history?
 - A. 3,000 years
 - B. 2,000 years
 - C. 4,000 years
 - D. 5,000 years
- _____ 6. Yu was credited for taming floods in the:
 - A. Yellow River
 - B. Yangtze River
 - C. Songhua River
 - D. Pearl River
- _____ 7. According to Chinese legends, who invented silk?
 - A. Shun's son
 - B. Yu's mother
 - C. Chi You's daughter
 - D. Yellow Emperor's wife

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- _____ 8. According to Chinese legends, who invented metal weapons?
- A. Yu
 - B. Chi You
 - C. Dr. Sun Yat-sen
 - D. Shun
- _____ 9. What dynasty did Dr. Sun Yat-sen overthrow?
- A. Qin
 - B. Tang
 - C. Qing
 - D. Shang
- _____ 10. Whose descendents do all Chinese consider themselves to be?
- A. Chi You's
 - B. Shun's
 - C. Yu's
 - D. Yellow Emperor's

[illegible]