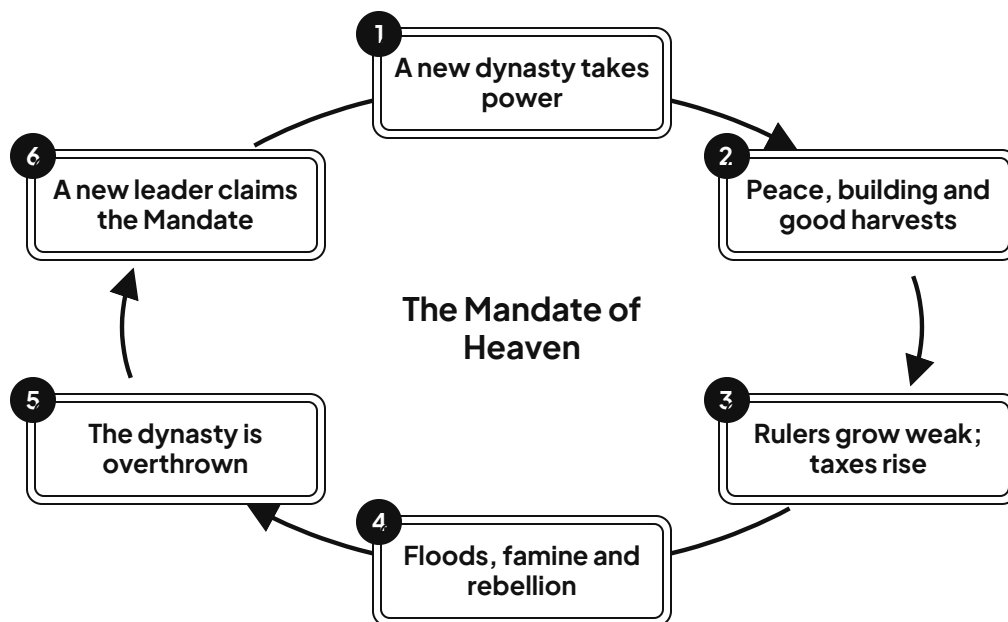




THE DYNASTIC CYCLE



Chinese historians saw a pattern in their past. A dynasty rose, grew strong, weakened and fell, and then a new one began, again and again. They explained the pattern with the Mandate of Heaven: Heaven gave a good ruler the right to rule and took it away from a bad one. Historians today call this pattern the dynastic cycle.



1. **A new dynasty takes power.** A new ruler and his family take the throne. They say Heaven has given them the Mandate. They bring back order, fix what was broken and lower taxes so farmers can recover.
2. **Peace, building and good harvests.** The dynasty is strong. Farms grow plenty of food, trade grows and the rulers build roads, canals and walls. People take the peace and good harvests as signs that Heaven is pleased.
3. **Rulers grow weak; taxes rise.** Later rulers become weak, careless or cruel. Officials grow greedy, taxes rise and people are forced to work on huge projects. Roads, canals and levees are not kept up.
4. **Floods, famine and rebellion.** Floods, droughts and famines strike, and hungry farmers rebel. People take these troubles as signs that Heaven is angry and that the ruler is losing the Mandate.
5. **The dynasty is overthrown.** Rebels or invaders defeat the ruler's armies, and the old dynasty falls. People say it has lost the Mandate of Heaven. Fighting may go on for years.
6. **A new leader claims the Mandate.** A strong leader wins the fighting and says Heaven has chosen him. If he succeeds, people take his victory as proof. He starts a new dynasty, and the cycle begins again.

◆ THE CYCLE IN HISTORY ◆

Shang → Zhou, 1046 BC

Zhou writers later said the last Shang king was cruel and wasteful and ignored his duties, and many lords turned against him (stages 3 and 4). In 1046 BC, King Wu of Zhou led an army against him and won, and the Shang fell (stage 5). The Zhou said Heaven had taken the Mandate from the Shang and given it to them (stage 6). They gave land to lords and brought back order (stage 1).

Qin → Han, 206 BC

Qin Shi Huang's strict laws, heavy taxes and forced work on walls, roads and his tomb made people suffer. The Qin raced through the cycle in one lifetime: its founder's harsh rule already looked like stage 3. After he died in 210 BC, rebellions broke out (stage 4), and the Qin fell in 206 BC (stage 5). Liu Bang, a village official from a farming family, became King of Han in 206 BC, defeated his rival Xiang Yu and became emperor in 202 BC (stage 6). Early Han rulers lowered taxes (stage 1).