

TRENDS JOURNAL

HISTORY BEFORE IT HAPPENS

» No foreign entanglements. » Wage war only when imminent threat exists. » Zero tolerance for illegal wars based on lies and false reasoning. » Build communities here, not foreign nations elsewhere. » Let the people vote on whether to fund wars. » No foreign entanglements. » Wage war only when imminent threat exists. » Zero tolerance for illegal wars based on lies and false reasoning. » Build communities here, not foreign nations elsewhere. » Let the people vote on whether to fund wars. » No foreign entanglements. » Wage war only when imminent threat exists. » Zero

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Look back to see what's ahead

No denying what history tries to teach us

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"Those who fail to learn from the past are doomed to repeat it."

Few people aren't familiar with this quote from philosopher George Santayana. But does history repeat itself because we fail to learn from it, or is it because history follows an unbreakable pattern we are doomed to repeat? The answer is crucial since, by all indicators, we are about to repeat the classic pattern of social collapse.

The theory of history repeating itself is as old as history itself. The earliest written expression of the theory dates back 3,500 years to the Hindu writings known as the Vedas. Since then, many students of history, from the Greek historian Polybius to one of the fathers of modern history, A. J. Toynbee, have formulated theories of historical cycles.

The clearest example of repeating patterns can be seen in the Chinese Dynastic Cycle, which charts a repetitive rise and fall of dynasties, unbroken over 3,000 years. Historians divide this cycle into four parts: the founding of the dynasty, the flowering, the decline, and the period of chaos be-

tween dynasties.

This four-stage pattern is common to most theories of historical cycles. Although the names given to stages vary, their characteristics remain nearly identical. Combining the most common attributions for each stage, I term them the Warrior, Intellectual, Merchant and Chaos stages.

Warrior Stage: After the previous dynasty has collapsed and the country breaks apart, a new warlord vanquishes his rivals, declares himself emperor and founds the next dynasty. This is the age of heroes, in which value is accorded to honor, strength and courage. Notable activities include exploration, conquest,

WARRIOR
STAGE



ad – it ain't pretty

colonization and building infrastructure. Crime is at its lowest; women's equality at its highest. Wealth is distributed on a meritocratic basis and the population level recovers from previous lows.

Intellectual Stage: Each new dynasty needs to establish its legitimacy through benevolent rule and so, during the reigns of the next few emperors, the living conditions of the common people begin to improve. This is often the dynasty's "Golden Age," valuing arts and sciences, new ideas, inventions and techniques. Notable activities include public art projects and the founding of libraries and universities. Crime is low, women's equality remains high and wealth begins accumulating toward administration. Population continues to increase.

Merchant Stage: While the empire enjoys a period of peace and stability, merchants prosper and the standard of living continues to improve. However, the seeds of the dynasty's decline already have been sown in the growth of a vast bureaucracy. Soon the government is controlling and taxing all facets of daily life. This is the age when greed dominates the political system. Crime increases, women's social status declines and wealth begins accumulating toward

Illustrations by Anthony Freda

oligarchs. Population continues to increase.

Chaos Stage: The dynasty is in decay and on the verge of collapse. The court and courtiers are corrupt and decadent. The emperor is effeminate, licentious and often an idiot.

Having pilfered the treasury, the empire raises taxes until the common people are reduced to poverty. The country's infrastructure falls into disrepair; levies and irrigation systems fail, destroying farms and crops and causing famines. The people rise up.

This is the age when government is so rife with corruption that it is unable to effectively rule. There is a breakdown of law and order. Crime is rampant, women's status reaches its lowest point and, because of disease, warfare and natural disasters, population declines rapidly. Wealth is in the hands of criminals.

THE INEVITABILITY OF WAR

The country splits apart into warring factions, each fighting for dominance through a series of civil wars. The fighting continues until a new "hero" takes control and founds the next dynasty.

This, then, is the Chinese Dynastic Cycle based on a four-stage pat-

INTELLECTUAL
STAGE



Learning basic disaster preparedness and working together in mutual support are key survival strategies.

tern. Can the theory be applied to all civilizations and used to predict future trends? If you study the history of various empires, from ancient Egypt and Rome to the Aztec and Inca, you will find this four-stage pattern, with slight variations, always discernable.

So at what stage in this cycle is America, and where are we heading?

Comparing the characteristics of each stage to our current conditions, we can quickly eliminate the Warrior and Intellectual ages. The days of heroic leaders and brilliant thinkers belong to an America long past.

Obviously, we are in the Merchant Stage and, as anyone who has tried to buy anything “Made in America” can tell you, we are at the end of that stage. The destruction of America’s manufacturing base and devastation of its natural resources indicate that the fat lady is about to take to the stage.

So is history doomed to repeat itself, or can we learn from mistakes and avoid rushing headlong into chaos?

In the case of China, history shows that no dynasty was able to avoid this fate. Did it fail to learn from the past? Far from it; China’s philosophers and historians were

well aware of the mistakes made by previous dynasties and ceaselessly warned emperors of the perils of ignoring the past, all to no avail. Unfortunately, the evidence suggests that civilizations are, indeed, doomed to repeat the past.

PREPARING FOR THE COMING CHAOS

Whether they have taken heed of a predictive model based on historical cycles, or are mindlessly playing out their villainous roles, there can be little doubt that the current elite are preparing for Chaos. How else to explain the militarization of domestic police? The massive purchase of arms, ammunition and armored vehicles? The full-spectrum domestic surveillance? And the endless nibbling away at our rights and freedoms?

Obviously, their plan, as was the plan of all despots before them, is to hole up behind a wall of security while the rest of us fight over the remaining scraps of our civilization.

Of the four ages, the easiest to predict is the age of Chaos. It seems every regime throughout history uses the same worn-out playbook on how to self-destruct. So here is the future: Widespread corruption drains the state treasury. To make up the losses,

**MERCHANT
STAGE**



the state increases taxation, driving businesses into bankruptcy and employees into poverty. Taxation quickly becomes forcible confiscation of property, precious metals and food.

Food protests turn into riots. The state marches out its henchmen to “teach the rabble a lesson.” Martial law is declared and the full array of terror tactics, from unreasonable search and seizure to imprisonment and torture, are used against dissenters.

Meanwhile, lack of government funding leaves the infrastructure to crumble. In the past, this meant farmlands either were flooded or dried up; crops failed; and starvation ensued. In our modern world, we can add the prospect of grid failure: no gas to heat your home or run your vehicles, and no access to clean drinking water.

HISTORY GIVES US WARNING SIGNS

Starving people become desperate and crime increases. Poor nutrition and lack of funding for hospitals or medical supplies contribute to an increase in epidemic diseases.

The state’s last play is to start a war to kill off a goodly number of “useless eaters” and force the survivors into submission.

So what did people in the past do to survive the age of Chaos? One strategy used in many civilizations was the monastic system. After the fall of Rome, monasteries served as centers of trade and produced

Illustrations by Anthony Freda

much of the local wealth through farming, wine-making and small industries. They were the only places where one could receive any sort of education, and if not for the books they preserved and copied, we would know nothing about ancient history.

In China, India, Japan and the Middle East, monasteries were able to survive relatively unscathed while their societies collapsed around them.

If we remove the religious aspect, what we have are autonomous communities that are self-sufficient, share knowledge and skills, and support each other during the bad times. A more recent and secular example of such communities can be found in the mutual aid societies of the 1800s. Learning basic disaster preparedness and working together in mutual support are key survival strategies.

Despite the grim short-term forecast, the not-too-distant future will be brighter, since the next stage is the Warrior Age with its return to ethics, prosperity and equality.

So what of the elite? Will they emerge from their bunkers to enslave and rule the world as their ultimate dream comes true? In this, Chinese history is in accord with Karma. Every member of the aristocracy, of each failed dynasty, was hunted down and executed during the ages of Chaos. Only one emperor lived long enough to see the founding of the succeeding dynasty, and he did so by hiding for 40 years... in a monastery. **TJ**

**CHAOS
STAGE**

