

Legacy of qin shi huangdi



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Legalism is a belief system that emerged in Ancient China during the era of the Warring States (771-221 B. C.), during which several viewpoints for reestablishing peace within China were competing following societal disorder. It was an approach defined by extreme methods, goals, and strict adherence to law. Under this political philosophy, human nature was perceived as evil and therefore heavy restraints were to be placed on humans. The laws established during this period were meant to be easily understandable, punishments threatening, and rewards prompt so that people decided to do exactly what the government asked of them(Major). Under legalism, a highly efficient and powerful government was believed to be fundamental to maintaining stability. Any disobedience was to be met with harsh punishments to make it less appealing for people to choose to be disobedient, while the well execution of duties by people was to be rewarded to encourage such complying behavior. It was not until Shi Huangdi came to the throne in 246 B. C., did Legalist ideology gain favor and actually be implemented in China. The first emperor used 4 methods to rule and unify China effectively, of which were centralization, standardization, censorship, and human rights abuse. One of these practices, censorship, helped accomplish its goal of unifying China by discouraging the presence of controversy which slows down the integration of society. Censorship is an important indicator for the presence of Legalism and it seems apparent that it has increased from Ancient China in terms of complexity. While Modern China, no longer reflects the extent to which Legalism has been prevalent in Ancient China, it, a country that lacks media freedom, still is imprinted with the main aspects associated with this philosophy.

Censorship is the practice of officially examining books, movies, written works, and other objects in order to suppress unacceptable or objectionable parts. The purpose of this is to discourage opinion that may be detrimental to the government and is able to cause debate. In Ancient China, Legalist used censorship to control ideas, actions, and people's behavior. One way they showed use of it was by ordering a campaign in 213 B. C. for confiscating and burning books in private hands that were harmful toward the government (Major). Another more serious action that illustrates the back-then use of censorship was Huangdi's burial of Confucian scholars alive in the capital after learning about their dissent toward his policies. Therefore, censorship allowed individuals that go against the government in any way or caused disputes in society to be easily removed. Without any amount of censorship, people can be easily persuaded by materials used to convey opinion and the government would face difficulty in controlling its citizens.

Today, the "Great Firewall of China" is the technology that the Chinese government uses to block access to material it finds inappropriate on the web (Olesen). Chinese Internet users are restricted with this from having the freedom to view certain search results fully, have discussions on certain topic, and to be able to express any comments freely. According to an academic cooperative, "China has the world's 'most sophisticated' internet filtering system," and the "Chinese government... is arguably the world's best at controlling what is people see" (Wiseman). This is due to the Chinese government's intolerance of dissent that can be easily found when viewing information on the web. Internet freedom is important because as President Obama stated, "the more freely information flows, the stronger the society

becomes, because then citizens of countries around the world can hold their own governments accountable” (Scherer). The Chinese government would be likely to disagree and apparently would want their citizens to be constrained as on the web to lessen their power and influence, to make the government more powerful and dominating over them as during the Legalist era when citizens were represented as powerless, insignificant government workers. Accessing data on sensitive as well as controversial subjects is difficult with the Chinese monitoring all incoming and outgoing traffic on the web. An example of a specialized search engine for China that filters results effectively on such topics is Google China. With this website, when users type in “ Tiananmen Square,” they will receive only the tourist images of the place and not the images of the 1989 protests for democratic reform there that ended up in a violent crackdown by the Chinese government (Wiseman). This reveals how the Chinese government is reluctant to have certain information online because it can be used to persuade them to take blame for something; the government tries to act as if less responsible for an event that went wrong when they previously intervened in it. Therefore, China uses “ propaganda officials” who send out “ teams of commentators to post patriotic messages on websites and online bulletin boards” to encourage the spread of nationalist opinion and/or positive feedback by citizens to the government (Edward). This helps show how the government tries to hide information it feels shouldn’t be shared with information that’s more likely to encourage positive attitude toward the government.

Censorship efforts are also seen on television in China, where they are used to limit foreign ideas swaying citizens. Because the news media is not

privatized, but managed by the government, the government has more power than citizens and has the ability to force media stations to use only “approved” news stories rather than any criticizing China’s government (Haugen). Publishing or broadcasting on television anything that is distasteful to the Chinese government is illegal in the nation and can lead to imprisonment (Haugen). Again, these laws help protect the Chinese government more than the government’s citizens, which would have been supported by the Legalists. An example of TV censorship that occurred this month was during President Obama’s visit to China. After American officials negotiated to have the Chinese set aside live nationwide broadcast time for the president’s town hall with Chinese student, China still refused to follow their requests, and the event was shown later on TV (Scherer). This gave time for Chinese officials to edit the speech. When the president addressed the world in his inaugural and reached a line in his speech describing communism, the live broadcast in China was cut off and later versions of the speech had this part censored (Edward). Another line edited spoke to countries that imposed censorship policies to prevent criticism of their government. China might have censored such presidential comments to lessen the influence from Western values and to block out any sort of persuasion that might cause its citizens to do actions other cultures support but are unwelcome in China as they break with traditional Chinese values. This suggests China still has a hint of isolationism attitude toward other nations as it did have in the Legalist era and doesn’t want to blend in with other countries as blending in would fade away traditional principles. Censorship is used to prevent Chinese citizens from complying with other nations other than China.

Although the philosophy of Legalism isn't prevailing as it was in Ancient China, the heavy presence of media censorship on the Internet, television, and on foreign ideas, in China today, reveals that there is still a lasting impact from legalism that can be noticed. If there wasn't any presence of Legalism, then, modern Chinese government would have been drastically different as citizens would have much more power than the government. But it isn't in a country that lacks essential media freedom.

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