

# Chinese philosophy essay sample



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Three areas of philosophy emerged amidst the chaos and constant warring of the Zhou era. The three were called Confucianism, Daoism, and legalism. They were Chinese philosophies that were thought to be the best ways to rule and achieve order in the society. Confucianism believed that a ruler's job was to set a good example, and not order. Since people were thought of as naturally good, they would follow the right path based on their own conscience. Legalism was a more harsh way of ruling, led by Hanfeizi. They thought people were evil, and needed strict laws and punishment to keep them in line. Daoism was very different from either of the other two. It was led by Laozi, who taught that the best kind of government was one who governed the least. They allowed things to simply take their natural course and work themselves out. Although both Daoism and legalism were working philosophies, Confucianism was the most effective in obtaining order.

At the time of the three philosophies, Ancient China was in a state of complete chaos. The duration of anarchy was named The Warring States Period, a period in which small feuding kingdoms or fiefdoms struggled for supremacy. It took place in the Zhou dynasty from 403 bc. to 221bc. The period was dominated by seven or more small feuding Chinese kingdoms. It was the age of Confucian thinkers Mencius and Xunzi, and the time when many of the government institutions and cultural patterns that would characterize China for the next 2, 000 years were established.

Legalism achieved what all the other philosophies strove for, unification of China. The Qin Dynasty, operating under the Legalist philosophy, finally unified China in 221 BC. Legalism was a success. However, the Qin Dynasty dissolved only 14 years after it's founding. The Qin emperor was ruthless in

his use of Legalism, punishing even small crimes with decapitation or the loss of a hand or foot. Han Feizi, legalisms founder, did not believe in gaining the respect of the people. He stated " Those who are ignorant about government insistently say: " Win the hearts of the people "" (Document H). To uphold his beliefs books and scholars which held beliefs against Legalism (such as Confucianism) were destroyed. The people were heavily taxed and forced into labor on major government projects. He successfully put the fear and respect of the law and government into the people, but it was too much. After his death, peasant rebellions caused the end of Legalism as the ruling philosophy of China. The harshness of the Legalist Qin would be remembered afterwards, and in response the following dynasty, the Han, distanced itself from Legalism and made Confucianism the official philosophy.

Daoism adds spirituality to the otherwise melancholy world of Chinese philosophy. The quote " Look to simplicity; cleave the uncarved block; Diminish self and curb desires" (Document G) is a perfect example of the views held by Daoist followers. Its teachings appealed to those who wished to withdraw from the politics and deception of society. Daoism's concepts of harmony and relativity make a lot of sense even today. The idea of using nature as the model, which people look up to, is reflected in the religion. Because of its anti-society attitude, Daoism obviously never made its way into any systems of government. It survived among the private citizens and to this day, Daoist monks still exist in China. Daoism was founded by Laozi in the sixth century BC. His teachings were passed down orally before they

were compiled in the third century BC in a book called the “ Classic of the Way and Its Power.”

Dao means “ way.” It is understood that the Dao is the underlying pattern of the universe, which can neither be described in words nor conceived in thought. The goal of Daoism is to bring all elements of existence- heaven, earth, and man- into harmony. To be in accordance with the Dao, the individual must empty himself of doctrines and knowledge, act with simplicity and humility, and above all seek Nature. The idea of turning to Nature for peace and harmony had a great effect on East Asian cultures, especially in the arts, where idealized and imaginary landscapes and natural art forms are profoundly linked to the beliefs of Daoism.

At first, Confucianism was unsuccessful and Confucius, during his lifetime only managed to collect a few followers. After his death, however, his followers passed on the Confucian tradition. It survived, with a few changes, to the Han dynasty (221 BC) and became established as China’s official philosophy. From then it was firmly well established in Chinese culture, and its values can still be seen today. The Five Classics of Confucianism were works from the Zhou Dynasty, which preceded the Warring States Period. They were collected and edited by members of the original Confucian school. After Confucianism became the official state philosophy, one had to know the philosophy well in order to gain the coveted position of government official.

The Analects are a collection of sayings by Confucius, recorded by his disciples. As a result, the Analects are not a widespread proposal of

Confucianism. Rather, it is a collection of quotations and stories. Because of this, Confucianism according to Confucius is open to interpretation. The main idea of the philosophy is, righteousness, relationships and generosity towards others. Since the time of the Han dynasty (206 CE) four life passages have been recognized and regulated by Confucian tradition. There are approximately 6 million Confucians in the world. About 26, 000 live in North America; almost all of the remainder are found throughout China and the rest of Asia.

In Chinese tradition, filial piety was the key duty. In one of Confucius' analects he stated, " The superior man while his parents are alive, reverently nourishes them; and when they are dead, reverently sacrifices to them. His chief thought is how, to the end of life, not to disgrace them" (Document B). Being a filial son meant absolute obedience to one's parents during their lifetime and as they grew older, taking the best possible care of them. After their death the eldest son was required to perform ritual sacrifices at their gravesite or in the ancestral temple. A son could also express his devotion to his parents by passing the Civil Service examinations, winning prestige for the whole family. Most important of all, a son had to make sure that the family line would be continued.

Dying without a son therefore was one of the worst offenses against the concept of filial piety. If a marriage remained barren, it was a son's duty to take a second wife or adopt a child in order to continue the family. Since Chinese women became part of their husband's family through marriage, filial conduct for a woman meant faithfully serving her in-laws, in particular her mother-in-law, and giving birth to a son. By fulfilling these duties, she

also gained prestige for her own family. If the mother and daughter-in-law did not get along, filial piety demanded that a man should get rid of his wife in order to please his mother. He could always get another wife, but he would only have one mother. These social rules in the culture helped in the unification of families in China

Some might argue that Daoism and Legalism were more efficient ways of acquiring harmony. Legalism was the most effective way of governing a society. The legalist tradition derives from the principle that the best way to control human behavior was through written law rather than through ritual, custom or ethics. The legalist tradition was derived from the principle that the best way to control human behavior was through written law rather than through ritual, custom or ethics. Daoism shaped Chinese life for more than 2,000 years. Daoism placed emphasis upon individual freedom and impulsiveness, non-interventionist government and social primitivism and ideas of self-transformation, and so represents in many ways the reverse of Confucian concern with individual moral duties, community standards, and governmental responsibilities. Both philosophies add up many pros, but fall short of Confucianism's vast accomplishments.

The inner pole of Confucianism was reformist, idealistic, and spiritual. It generated a high ideal for family interaction: members were to treat each other with love, respect, and consideration for the needs of all. The school of thought founded by Confucius has had the biggest impact on Chinese culture. It has lasted throughout the ages and literally pulled the Han Dynasty out of ruin and chaos. Even to this day, the influence of Confucianism can be espied in many matters of China.