

Legalism



Qin Shihuangdi, first emperor and unifier of China, used Legalist methods in his conquest of the entire Chinese nation.

- A. uniform application of the law for all (as opposed to more lenient sentences for upper classes)
 - B. purpose of courts is to decide the crime—the law proscribes the punishment for all crimes
 - C. standardization of weights and measures, currency, language
 - D. rewards, rank, and the right to wear distinctive clothing provided to those who excelled in war
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- ❖ Not a religion or even philosophy, so much as an approach to government
 - ❖ Reflected the interests of the king and the commoners, against the aristocrats
 - ❖ Very low view of human nature; use of the Two Handles (rewards and punishments) to influence people's behavior—relying on people's greed to motivate them to obey all laws

The two most famous legalists were Shang Yang (a prime minister of Qin, who died in 338 BC) and Han Feizi (d. 233 BC), who wrote Legalist texts but never got to become prime minister.

The state of Qin grew strong in the 300s BC under Shang, and continued to grow in power in the 200s BC, utilizing Legalist principles in its conquest of the entire nation of China; but others rebelled against their harsh tactics and methods. The Qin dynasty crumbled after only 15 years of ruling China (221-207 BC), being replaced by the Han dynasty that ruled for centuries (206 BC-220 AD).

Li Kui was Governor of the Upper Land of Wei, and he wanted every man in the district be a good archer. He issued a decree that if anyone was involved in an unsettled legal dispute, they would have a target shooting competition, and the winner would win the lawsuit. As soon as the decree was issued, the whole region began practicing archery day and night continuously. And then, when the region went to war with Qin, they obliterated the force from Qin, due to the fact that everyone was such a good archer.

The tiger is able to subdue the dog because of its claws and fangs. If the tiger abandons its claws and fangs and lets the dog use them, it will be subdued by the dog.

---Han Feizi