



Ancient China Dissident Philosophies and the Han Empire

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1.What do the “Spring and Autumn” and “Warring States” periods mean?

Ans: **Spring and Autumn Period:** In the Chinese history, **Spring and Autumn Period**, took place during the Zhou dynasty (1046–256 bc)—specifically the first portion of the Dong (Eastern) Zhou—when many vassal states fought and competed for supremacy. It was named for the title of a Confucian book of chronicles, *Chunqiu*, covering the period 722–479 bc. During the spring and Autumn Period the imperial house, with priestly, ritualistic, and diplomatic functions but with diminishing authority, slowly sank out of sight as the local nobles struggled with one another for power. Survival required coalitions, both political and economic, as well as the accumulation of productive wealth. To this end, many drainage operations, canals, dams, lakes, roads, and the like were undertaken, often on a divided highway or multistate basis. Long walls too were thrown up as a means of protection not only against one another but also against native and nomadic tribes. Merchants and artisans began to assume some significance. Education and intellectual life advanced, this being the period of Confucius and other famous thinkers.

Warring States: **Warring States**, also called Contending (Competing) States, (475–221 bc), labeled for seven or more small argumentative Chinese kingdoms whose careers collectively represent an era in Chinese history. The Warring States period was one of the most fertile and influential in Chinese history. It not only saw the rise of many of the great philosophers of Chinese civilization, including the Confucian thinkers Mencius and Xunzi, but also witnessed the establishment of many of the governmental structures and cultural patterns that were to characterize China for the next 2,000 years.

2.Who were the, “Scholar Officials”?

Ans: **Scholar-officials**, also known as **Scholar-gentlemen** were civil servants appointed by the emperor of China to perform day-to-day governance from the Han dynasty to the end of the Qing dynasty in 1912, China's last imperial dynasty.

In order to become a scholar official one must had to take the “Civil Service Test”. This test was a very difficult test. At first only the members of upper class were allowed to take the tests. Later the system grew to include people from other classes.

3. Who were the “Hundred Masters”?

Ans: The Hundred Schools of Thought were philosophers and schools that flourished from 770 to 221 BCE, an era of great cultural and intellectual expansion in China. Even though this period - known in its earlier part as the “Spring and Autumn” period and the “Warring States” period - in its latter part was filled with chaos and bloody battles, it is also known as the “Golden Age” of Chinese philosophy.

Confucianism and Its Derivatives: Confucianism is the body of thought that has arguably had the most enduring effect on Chinese life. Also known as the School of the Scholars, its written legacy lies in the Confucian Classics, which later became the foundation of the traditional society. Confucius (551- 479 BCE), also called Kong Zi or Master Kong, looked to the early days of the Zhou dynasty for an ideal socio-political order. He believed that the only effective system of government necessitated prescribed relationships for each individual: "Let the ruler be a ruler and the subject a subject". Furthermore, he contended that a king must be virtuous in order to rule properly. To Confucius, the functions of government and social stratification were facts of life to be sustained by ethical values; thus his ideal human was the junzi (or ruler's son), which is often translated "gentleman".

Mencius (371- 289 BCE), or Meng Zi, was a Confucian disciple who made major contributions to the spread of humanism in Confucian thought, declaring that man, by nature, was inherently good. He argued that a ruler could not govern without the people's tacit consent, and that the penalty for unpopular, despotic rule was the loss of the "mandate of heaven".

The effect of the combined work of Confucius, the codifier and interpreter of a system of relationships based on ethical behavior, and Mencius, the synthesizer and developer of applied Confucian thought, was to provide traditional Chinese society with a comprehensive framework by which to order virtually every aspect of life.

There were to be accretions to the body of Confucian thought, both immediately and over the millennia, from within and outside the Confucian school. Interpretations adapted to contemporary society allowed for flexibility within Confucianism, while the fundamental system of modeled behavior from ancient texts formed its philosophical core.

Diametrically opposed to Mencius, for example, was the interpretation of Xun Zi (c. 300- 237 BCE), another Confucian follower. Xun Zi preached that man is innately selfish and evil; he asserted that goodness is attainable only through education and conduct befitting one's status. He also argued that the best form of government is one based on authoritarian control, and that ethics is irrelevant in the context of effective rule

Legalism: The School of Law, or Legalism (法家; *Fǎjiā*; *Fa-chia*; "School of law"), was a response to Xunzi's unsentimental and authoritarian philosophy. The doctrine was formulated by Han Feizi (韓非子)(d. 233 B.C.E.) and Li Si (李斯)(d. 208 B.C.E.), who maintained that human nature was incorrigibly selfish; accordingly, the only way to preserve the social order was to impose discipline from above, and to strictly enforce laws. The Legalists exalted the state above all, giving its prosperity and martial prowess priority over the welfare of the common people.

Although it had all but disappeared by the first dynasty, Legalism greatly influenced the form of the imperial government. During the Han Dynasty (漢朝; *Hàn Cháo*; 206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.), the most practical elements of Confucianism and Legalism were synthesized to create a new form of government that remained largely intact until the late nineteenth century.

Taoism: Philosophical Taoism, or Daoism (道家; *Dàojiā*; *Tao-chia*; "School of the Way"), developed into the second most significant stream of Chinese thought. Its formulation is often attributed to the legendary sage, Laozi (老子, "Old Master"), who is said to predate Confucius, and Zhuangzi (莊子; 庄子, Zhuāng Zǐ, Chuang Tzŭ, "Master Zhuang") (369–286 B.C.E.). The focus of Taoism is on the individual within the natural realm rather than the individual within society; accordingly, the goal of life for each individual is seeking to adjust oneself and adapting to the rhythm of the natural (and the supernatural) world, to follow the Way (tao or *Dao*, 道, *Dou*) of the universe, and to live in harmony. In many ways the opposite of rigid Confucian morality, Taoism was for many of its adherents a complement to their ordered daily lives. A scholar serving as an official would usually follow Confucian teachings, but at leisure or in retirement might seek harmony with nature as a Taoist recluse.

School of Yin- Yang: Another strain of thought dating to the Warring States Period is the school of yin-yang and the Five Elements. Zou Yan (鄒衍/邹衍; Zōu Yǎn; Tsou Yen; 305 B.C.E.-240 B.C.E.) is considered the founder of this school, whose theories attempted to explain the universe in terms of basic forces in nature: the complementary agents of yin (dark, cold, female, negative) and yang (light, hot, male, positive) and the Five Elements (water, fire, wood, metal, and earth). In its early days, these theories were most strongly associated with the states of Yan and Qi. In later periods, these epistemological theories came to hold significance in both philosophy and popular belief.

Mohism: The school of Mohism was founded upon the doctrine of Mozi (also referred to as Mo Di; 470- c.391 BCE). Though the school did not survive through the Qin Dynasty, Mohism was seen as a major rival of Confucianism in the period of the Hundred Schools of Thought. Its philosophy rested on the idea of universal love: Mozi believed that "all men are equal before heaven", and that mankind should seek to imitate heaven by engaging in the practice of collective love. His epistemology can be regarded as primitive materialist empiricism; he believed that our cognition ought to be based on our perceptions –“our

sensory experiences, such as sight and hearing –“instead of imagination or internal logic, elements founded on our capacity for abstraction.

Mozi advocated frugality, condemning the Confucian emphasis on ritual and music, which he denounced as extravagant. He regarded warfare as wasteful and advocated pacifism. The achievement of social goals, according to Mozi, necessitated the unity of thought and action. His political philosophy bears a resemblance to divine-rule monarchy: the population ought always to obey its leaders, as its leaders ought always to follow the will of heaven. Mohism might be argued to have elements of meritocracy: Mozi contended that rulers should appoint officials by virtue of their ability instead of their family connections. Although popular faith in Mohism had declined by the end of the Qin Dynasty, its views are said to be strongly echoed in Legalist thought.

Logicians: The School of Names, or Logicians (名家; *Míngjiā*; *Ming-chia*; "School of names"), which grew out of Mohism, focused on definition and logic. It is said to have parallels with the logic of the Ancient Greek sophists or dialecticians. The most notable Logicians were Gongsun Longzi (公孫龍; Gōngsūn Lóng; Kungsun Lung, ca. 325–250 B.C.E.) and Hui Shi, both of whose works have been lost. The Logicians' thought was purely theoretical.

Other schools: The *Shiji* (史記) lists Confucianism, Daoism, the Yin-Yang School, Legalism, Mohism, and the Logicians within the Hundred Schools of Thought. The *Hanshu* (漢書) adds four more to make up the Ten Schools (十家; *Shijia*).

- **The School of Agriculture (農家/农家, *Nongjia*)** encouraged farming and agriculture and taught farming and cultivation techniques, as a means of supplying enough food for the country. Mencius once criticized Xu Xing (許行) for advocating that rulers should work in the fields with their subjects.
- **The School of Diplomacy, or School of Vertical and Horizontal (Alliances) (縱橫家/纵横家, *Zonghengjia*)** specialized in diplomatic politics.

- The **Miscellaneous School** (雜家/杂家, *Zajia*) integrated teachings from different schools; for instance, Lü Buwei found scholars from different schools to collaborate in writing a book called *Lüshi Chunqiu* (呂氏春秋). This eclectic school tried to integrate the merits of various schools, such as Confucianism, Taoism, Mohism, Logicians, and Legalism, and avoid their weak points, and did not have its own unique principles. iv) The **School of "Minor-talks"** (小說家/小说家; *Xiaoshuojia*) was not a unique school of thought. The thoughts and ideas discussed by and originating from infamous people on the street were incorporated into this school, which grew out of the work of some government officials responsible for collecting ideas from people on the street and reporting them to their superiors. This explains its Chinese name, which literally means "school of minor-talks."

Philosophers of the **Novel School** expressed themselves in a way that people found easy to understand. They didn't have their own theories, but used a specific style to convey existing theories.

Another group is the **School of the Military** (兵家; *Bingjia*), which studied warfare and strategy; Sunzi (孫子; Sūn Zǐ, "Master Sun") and Sun Bin (孫臏; Sūn Bìn; d. 316 B.C.E.) were influential leaders. This school was not among the "Ten Schools" defined by Hanshu.

4.What were the five vital human relationships according to Confucius?

Ans: Five vital human relationships between: husband and wife, parent and child, elder and younger, ruler and subject, friend and friend.

5.How did Confucius define the “Superior Man”?

Ans: Proposed a moral framework to create an enlightened society through:

- correct performance of ritual;
- responsibility and loyalty to the family and
- Perfection of moral character to become a ‘superior man’.

No coercion or punishment needed in an enlightened society of ‘superior men’.

6.How did Laozi explain the virtues of “Doing Nothing”?

Ans: *Wu wei* (*non-doing*) is an important concept in Taoism that literally means *non-action* or *non-doing*. In the *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu explains that beings (or phenomena) that are wholly in harmony with the Tao behave in a completely natural, uncontrived way. The goal of spiritual practice for the human being is, according to Lao Tzu, the attainment of this purely natural way of behaving, as when the planets revolve around the sun. The planets effortlessly do this revolving without any sort of control, force, or attempt to revolve themselves, instead engaging in effortless and spontaneous movement.

“The Tao does nothing, but leaves nothing undone. If the powerful men could observe it,

all creations would be transformed by themselves.”

Lao Tzu Tao Te Cheng quotes.

7.What were the basic features of Legalism?

Ans: **Legalism** was propagated by Xunzi (Shun- dji) and Han Fai.

Legalism was a philosophy of administration in ancient **China**. Upon first acquaintance with this system it seems no more than a rationalization by political administrators for their having total political control of their societies.

They believed that people are naturally wicked and can only be forced to be good. Legalists wanted the **government** to pass strict laws. They wanted harsh punishments to make people afraid to do wrong.

8.What kind of a state did the Hans create?

Ans: Han Empire (206 BCE-220 CE) –the first long-lasting empire –est. by Liu Bang (aka Gaozu)

- The Han adopted empire management, uniform script, code of law etc.
Introduced by the Qin Background
- A strong bureaucratic state– registration of all males for taxation, conscription etc. – Centralization of local administration
 - Commanderies (over 30) governed by a civilian and a military commandant– accountable to the Emperor
 - Formal schools to provide trained bureaucrats
 - Confucianism as state philosophy

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9.What was “Pax Sinica”?

Ans: **Pax Sinica** (Latin for "Chinese peace") is a historiographical term, modeled after the original phrase **Pax Romana**, applied to the period of peace in East Asia, maintained by Chinese hegemony.

Long period of peace, stability and prosperity ensured by military success

- Facilitated long- distance trade and travel through the Silk Road
- Free farmers— paid a small portion of crops in taxes- Food storage and distribution— ensuring uninterrupted food supply to citizens
- China became a culturally homogenous country

10.What were the Han achievements?

Ans:

Founding of the Silk Road

- State academy established by Emperor Wu (Wudi) for training civil servants— selection through written tests
- Great Wall of China for protecting state borders and the Silk Road
- Development of paper, printing, acupuncture
- Flourishing agriculture, commerce and manufacturing

- Expansion of the empire from Southeastern China to Northern Vietnam, Northern Korea

11. Why did the Han Empire decline?

Ans: Weak, inefficient rule by later Hans

- Shortfall of tax revenue- peasant unrest-rise of generals and warlords
- Continuous raids by nomadic people (Uighurs, Kazakhs, Mongols) from the North and West
- Peasant rebellion in 184 CE– disintegration of Han Empire into 3 Kingdoms

12. What legacy did the Hans leave behind?

Ans: Influenced the East just as Greece and Rome influenced the West

- Rise of Confucianism as state ideology–nearly as influential as religion
- First example of administrative meritocracy– model for selecting civil servants on competitive basis
- ‘Chinese’ and ‘Han’ became synonymous- Han rem (Han people)