

HKU03x Humanity and Nature in Chinese Thought

Week 8: Xunzi and Legalism (Han-Fei-zi)

Section 7: Xunzi's Students and the end of the 100 Schools

- Han Fei and Li Si are associated with the first infamous emperor, Qin Shi Huang.
- Han Fei supports a single 道 *dao*^{path}, using punishment and reward to maintain this single 道 *dao*^{path}.
Like Xunzi, Han Fei and Li Si are skeptical of any natural moral standards.
- They attempted to set up various institutional structures, big and powerful and awe-inspiring, in order to display the emperor's greater-than-life persona, enabling him to rule through fear and command ultimate obedience from his officials. In this way the emperor's personal skills, talents, and 德 *de* or virtuosity (or lack thereof) becomes irrelevant, as the institutional structures will solidify and perpetuate rule and authority.
- Shang Yang suggests making clear the rules of 法 *fa*^{measurement standards} controlling the punishments. As a result, people will feel safer and live without constant fear of punishment from the officials, because they know the rules clearly. This is directly opposed to the Confucian officials who did not like publishing the 刑 *xing*^{punishment} because doing so would threaten their normative authority
- Han Fei focuses on the ruler's side of the 法 *fa*^{measurement standards}. In his theory, the ruler is never threatened by the people; the threat always comes from the high officials. So the goal of the 法 *fa*^{measurement standards} is to control the high officials and make sure they do not pose a serious threat to the ruler.