

Name: _____

Date: _____

The Legalists

Confucius taught that people are basically good, but about 250 years after the death of the great Chinese sage, a group of scholars known as the Legalists brought in a different view. The Legalists believed that humankind was evil and that, unless controlled, people would be concerned only with their own interests. The Legalists believed that society functioned best through strong government control and absolute obedience to authority, so they created laws that ordered strict punishments and rewards for behavior.

Confucius believed in virtue and natural order, but the Legalists believed that all human activity should be directed toward increasing the power of the ruler and the government. The Legalists held power by suppressing anyone who disagreed with them.

China had not been a unified nation for hundreds of years when the Legalists came to power. During an era that was later called the Age of Warring States, local rulers controlled many small kingdoms.



Shih Huang-ti

The ruler of the Ch'in state embraced the Legalist philosophy. The Ch'in united China by about 214BCE by conquering most rival kingdoms. The first Ch'in ruler of a united China took the title Shih Huang-ti, which means August Lord or First Emperor.

To stop any criticism, Shih Huang-ti and the Legalists banned all books on history and of classic Chinese literature that glorified past rulers. The First Emperor ordered all "non-essential" books collected and burned. He allowed only books on agriculture, medicine and pharmacy. Books written about Confucius and his philosophy were destroyed. During this period hundreds of scholars were put to death—many of them being buried alive.

The Legalists lost power shortly after the death of the First Emperor, and the succeeding rulers ended laws that destroyed books. Confucius' teaching managed to survive the Burning of the Books because his philosophy was often handed down orally from master to student. Thus, it was possible to reconstruct the texts from both memory and the surviving manuscripts.

Fill in the Blanks

The Legalists were a group of powerful C__i__e__e warlords who ended the A__e of W__r__i__g States and began the Ch'in D__n__s__y in the third c__n__u__y before the C__m__on E__a. The Legalists believed that people were s__l__i__h and had to be c__n__r__l__ed. This view contrasted with C__n__u__i__s, who believed that people were good. Shih Huang-ti u__i__ed China in 214BCE. Shortly after, his L__g__l__st followers b__r__ed books that *d__s__g__e__d with their *p__i__o__o__hy and ordered hundreds of s__h__l__rs buried a__i__e. Once the L__g__l__s__s left power, many of Confucius' students were able to r__c__n__t__u__t the teachings of the great *s__g__e by writing down what they remembered of what he said and by using texts they kept hidden while the legalists were in power.

Answer in complete sentences

*1. How did the philosophy of the legalists differ from Confucius' ideas?

2. Explain why the Legalists ordered that books be burned.

*This is a higher order learning question. You must answer the question to the best of your ability, but any reasonable answer will be graded as correct.