Name of the Institution

Confucian, Daoist, Legalist Ideas on Governing

Course Code: Course Title

By

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# Introduction

Confucianism is a philosophy that aims at upgrading people’s morality, creating a social order, and fostering a sense of responsibility in its followers. Daoism preaches of indulging in the worldly affairs only to the extent as it is necessary to fulfill the basic needs of life. Legalism is concerned with getting control over people through central government and severe penalties. All the three philosophies discuss the human behavior and society from their specific perspectives.

## Thesis Statement

This paper brings to light the historical setting, authors, relevant texts, and a comparison of Confucian, Daoist, and Legalist approaches to understand how these philosophies help in governing people.

## Research Methodology

To conduct a comparative study of the three theories – Confucian, Daoism, Legalism, the qualitative research methodology will be applied. The research findings and analysis would be based on reading the suggested textbook and other referenced materials by the instructors. The discussion will be developed through inductive reasoning and the information provided will have references to reinforce reading of the given materials.

# Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism

## Historical Setting

Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism – all were developed during the later years in Zhou dynasty, also referred to as, the “Warring States Period”[[1]](#footnote-1). During this era, different states across China fought with each other to gain political power and establish their reign. The warring situation created during this dynasty compelled the thinkers to find out a solution to this end. People sought peace and order in their society. The great thinkers of that era proposed ways of life supported by their philosophies. These philosophies enabled people to rethink about their ideologies, preferences, and norms. These reflections gave an insight into the values of life that should be adopted for success and salvation. Among others, three philosophies held more importance and they influenced the lives of people to relatively greater extent.

## Authors of the Philosophical Teachings

Confucian philosophy was developed from the teachings of Confucius[[2]](#footnote-2), which were recorded after his death. The English title of a compilation of his short conversations is the ‘Analects’. He was a teacher of morality and spirituality. Han Feizi gave up the Confucian philosophy to seek some more practical approaches toward managing the huge masses of people. He, therefore, inclined to Daoism and Legalism and when he died, he left the most authentic work on these two theories[[3]](#footnote-3). Another important piece of work is ‘Daodejing’ that describes the virtues related to the lives of common people as well as rulers. Daodejing is attributed to Laozi (the “old master”); however, the ascription is usually regarded as doubtful by the researchers[[4]](#footnote-4).

## Comparison of the Three Theories Based on the Given Texts

Confucian Philosophy taught to be humble, courteous, and just in handling the issues of governance. Confucius wanted individuals to perform their duties with a sense of morality. He did not encourage punishing people relentlessly when they indulged in negative behaviors. His teachings inspired the government officials to become trustworthy and respectful[[5]](#footnote-5). At one place, he was asked to give his priority to one of the three basic factors in governing the people, i.e., food, military, and the confidence of the people. He replied that food and military could be ignored to save the confidence of the people. He exclaimed about a ruler’s responsibilities that if the ruler was right, all the subordinates, the system, and the people would be on the right path. To rectify the system of governance, he suggested to rectify names, and the other things like language, affairs, rites, punishments, etc. would automatically be rectified.

Han Feizi advocated Daoism and Legalism to reinforce the significance of law in attaining peace in the state. He asserted that humaneness fails to achieve order. Instead, the government should establish the supremacy of law that would clarify the fact that penalties are essential to control the affairs of the state. He insisted to unify the laws rather than wasting efforts in finding noble men for work.

Unlike Confucianism, Legalism intended to consolidate powers under the rule of one central government. It discouraged the feudal system, and supported the legislative authorities to establish firmly[[6]](#footnote-6). Confucianism emphasizes to focus in people, whereas, Legalism asserts to apply bind everyone with law and its implications for the collective welfare of all. However, Daoism is different from these two theories. Confucianism and Legalism both emphasized their followers to strictly abide by the given set of principles. Daoism did not require any strict adherence to law or morality. It only asked for maintaining peace and not being actively involved in worldly affairs. Daoists believed that it was not the governments who created law and order in the society, but the people who could have a real impact on bringing a change. They, therefore, kept their focus on mending the ‘ways’ of people.

# Conclusion

The three theories of philosophy discussed above have their particular implications toward governing the people of a state. These theories are similar in the sense that all aim at developing peace and creating order. This is because these theories were developed in an era when the states of China were at war for long periods. Therefore, the thinkers tried to seek ways of dealing with the issues of governance. These theories differ in their principles and applications however. Confucianism insists on becoming noble; Legalism asserts to empower the law authorities; and Daoism emphasizes the way of life.

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   [↑](#footnote-ref-6)