Daoism, Confucianism, and legalism

*6.H.1 Use historical thinking to understand the emergence, expansion and decline of civilizations, societies, and regions over time.*

*6.H.2 Understand the political, economic, and/or social significance of historic events, issues, individuals or cultural groups.*

*6.C&G.1 Understand the development of government in various civilizations, societies, and regions.*

*6.C.1 Explain how the behaviors and practices of individuals and groups influence societies, civilizations, and regions.*

The Zhou dynasty ruled China from 1100 BCE to 256 CE, the longest rule of any dynasty in Chinese history. During much of the dynasty the Zhou emperors were only figure heads, the real power resided with the feudal lords of the outlying regions. As these feudal lords looked to expand their influence and political power, they gathered large groups of educated men to advise them. From these educated men, many schools of thought or philosophies were created. The three most important philosophies of this period were Daoism, Confucianism, and legalism.

Daoists did not believe in a lot of rules or government. They believed that people should be at one with nature and that all living things have a universal force flowing through them. Daoism was founded by Lao Tzu and he wrote his beliefs down in a book called the Tao Te Ching. These quotes were translated by Lionel Giles in 1905.

How does taxation effect the people?

The people starve because those in authority over them devour too many taxes; that is why they starve. The people are difficult to govern because those placed over them are meddlesome; that is why they are difficult to govern. He who respects the state as his own person is fit to govern it. He who loves the state as his own body is fit to be entrusted with it.

According to Lao Tzu, what makes a good leader?

Why are the people difficult to govern?

Confucius travelled throughout the feudal states and offered his services as a political advisor and teacher. Confucius’ philosophy focused on how people should behave and live. His teachings focused on treating others with respect, politeness, and fairness. After his death, his teachings were written down by his students and collected in four books. This section was translated by James Legge in 1893.

According to Confucius, how does an emperor become a good leader?

Chi K’ang asked, “how to cause the people reverence their ruler, to be faithful to him, and to go on to serve themselves to virtue.” The Master said, “let him preside over them with gravity, then they will reverence him. Let him be filial and kind to all, then they will be faithful to him. Let him advance the good and teach the incompetent, then they will eagerly seek to be virtuous.”

Legalist philosophers taught that to build a strong state, a ruler must have absolute power over his subjects. Li Si, the Chief advisor to the Emperor Shihuangdi, wrote many books about the legalist philosophy. This section is translated by Theodore de Bary in 1960.

The fact that intelligent rulers were able for a long time to hold high position and great power is due only to their ability always to apply severe punishments. It was for this reason that none in the empire dared to be rebellious. If a ruler does not take care to prevent rebellion, but instead acts like a loving mother who spoils her children, indeed he has not understood the principles of the wise men who came before him. When a ruler fails to practice the advice for governing the state left by the sages, what else does he do except make himself the slave of the empire? Is this not a pity?

How can an emperor become a slave to the people?

How does a leader avoid rebellion by the people?