Legalist thought was compiled from existing ideas and systematically formulated by Han Fei (韓非). It provided a theoretical foundation for the centralist rule of the Qin Dynasty. Legalism as a political thought, however, lacked a mechanism to limit and check the power of despotic monarchs, and it was very different from modern rule by law.

Three components of legalism: Han Fei. The school's most famous proponent and contributor, Han Fei (韓非), a disciple of the Confucian philosopher Xun Xi, synthesized the ideas of several earlier legalist thinkers, Shang Yang, Shen Buhai, and Shen Dao, on