

CHINA CROSSROADS

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Legalism and Han Feizi: The “Basic Good Modern State” in Dialogue with Confucianism and Liberalism

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Han Feizi's key criticism of Confucianism as an ideal theory is precisely that order has to be established before we can talk about good governance (or just order that embodies Confucian virtues or liberal values. To address the miseries in the failed states, then, political theorists should consider what would make a state a "basic good state," which is essential to various forms of ideal state, and should reflect on how to turn a failed state into an orderly and "basic good state" rather than an ideal state, be it a liberal democratic or a liberal meritocratic one. His ideas may be instrumental to these endeavors.

[Bai Tongdong](#) is the Dongfang Chair Professor of Philosophy at Fudan University in China. He has two books published in English: [China: The Political Philosophy of the Middle Kingdom](#) (2012), as well as [Against Political Equality: The Confucian Case](#) (2019). Professor Bai is currently working on the philosophy of Han Feizi, a Legalist and harsh critic of Confucians, as well as a real-life princeling who is often compared with Machiavelli and Hobbes. He is also the director of an English-based MA and visiting program in Chinese philosophy at Fudan University that is intended to promote the studies of Chinese philosophy in the world.

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