A Study on the origin of Han Fei Tzu's philosophy on Legalism.

Han Fei Tzu (281 B.C. - 233 B.C.) was the most leading figure in the legalistic school (法家) of the history of Chinese philosophy. He was a descendant of the royal house of the state of Han, (韓國) the present western Honan Province. He was an able writer and had composed a lengthy work bearing his name in fifty-five chapters in which he stressed that law should be made clear and penalty should be made strict to save all lives from chaos; to purge All-under-Heaven of calamities, to prevent the strong from oppressing the weak; to prevent the majority from transgressing the minority; to enable the aged and infirm to have a happy ending and to let the young and the orphan grow up in their best ways. He died in prison in 233 B.C. The cause was a political intrigue on the part of his former fellow student, Li Ssu (李斯) who was an official in Chin (秦), and who might have been jealous of the growing favour accorded to Han Fei.

The Shih Chi (史記) or Historical Records says that he was interested in pedology, epistemology, law and statecraft, tracing his principles to the
Yellow Emperor (黃帝) and Lao Tzu (老子) and it also says that he observed the changing factors of success and failure of the preceding ages, and accordingly, composed his works of one hundred thousand words. This means that Han Fei, being the last and great theorizer of the legalistic school, had opportunities to study and compare the advantages and disadvantages of the ideas of various schools then and that he had benefited from absorbing their advantages to create his ideas and build up a complete set of theoretical skeleton for legalistic school. Therefore, the origin of Han Fei's philosophy in legalism was rather complicated in the sense that he synthesized essential ideas of different major schools in Chou period (周) namely Confucianistic school (儒家), Taoist school (道家), school of Name (名家), Mohist school (墨家) and legalistic school (法家) into his political thoughts. To quote a few examples: he adopted Lao Tzu's Wu-wei (無為) or "having-no-activities" with certain modification, to become one of his important theories that the rulers of a state should do nothing by himself and should let the people and his officials do all the things for him; he strengthened his teacher, Hsun Tzu's (荀子) theory that human nature is originally evil by emphasizing
that punishment should be an important tool of the Ruler to control his ministers, officials and people; he considered Fa (法), Shu (術) Shih (勢) are the three equally important factors in politics and Government by combining three important groups in legalistic school which was before him and was headed by Shong Yang (商鞅), Shen Tao (慎到) and Shen Tu-hai (申不害) respectively.

On the whole, Han Fei Tzu was a great philosopher and the synthesizer of major schools with legalistic school in particular, of ancient China. His theories in legalism had a great influence on Chinese history. The first Emperor of the Chin Dynasty (秦始皇) applied his principles and finally forcibly unified China in 221 B.C. He exclaimed: "Lo! only if I, the king, can meet the author and become friendly with him, I would not regret my death thereafter," when he first read Han Fei Tzu's works.