

# James Legge and the Chinese Classics: A Western Scholar's Journey into the Heart of Ancient China

In the mid-19th century, a Scottish missionary named James Legge embarked on an extraordinary journey that would forever bridge the gap between East and West. With an insatiable thirst for knowledge and a deep respect for Chinese culture, he dedicated himself to translating the Chinese classics, unlocking the wisdom of ancient China for a Western audience.

James Legge was born in Huntly, Scotland, in 1815. From a young age, he displayed an exceptional aptitude for languages and a keen interest in religion. He studied theology at the University of Aberdeen and was ordained as a minister in the Church of Scotland in 1839.

In 1843, Legge arrived in Malacca, a British colony in Southeast Asia, to serve as a missionary. It was during this time that he encountered Chinese literature and became fascinated by its depth and complexity. Recognizing the importance of understanding the culture of the people he served, he began studying Chinese language and literature with great enthusiasm.



## James Legge and the Chinese Classics

by Marilyn Laura Bowman

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

Language : English

File size : 3867 KB

Text-to-Speech : Enabled

Screen Reader : Supported

Enhanced typesetting: Enabled

Word Wise : Enabled

Print length : 1465 pages



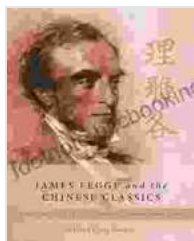
In 1861, Legge returned to England with a mission to translate the Chinese classics into English. He believed that these ancient texts held profound insights into Chinese society and thought, and that they deserved a wider audience. Over the next several decades, he devoted himself to this monumental task.

1. **Analects of Confucius (1861):** Legge's first major translation was the Analects of Confucius, a collection of the teachings and conversations of the renowned Chinese philosopher. His meticulous translation captured the essence of Confucius's philosophy and made it accessible to Western readers.
2. **Book of Rites (1885):** The Book of Rites is a vast collection of ancient Chinese rituals, ceremonies, and social norms. Legge's translation provided invaluable insights into the social and cultural life of ancient China.
3. **Classic of Poetry (1876):** The Classic of Poetry is a collection of ancient Chinese poems, many of which date back to the 10th century BC. Legge's translation showcased the lyrical beauty and cultural significance of these timeless works.

James Legge's translations of the Chinese classics had a profound impact on Western scholarship. For the first time, Western academics and intellectuals had access to reliable and accurate translations of these seminal texts. Legge's work opened up new avenues of research and led to a greater understanding of Chinese philosophy, history, and culture.

James Legge's legacy as a scholar and translator is immeasurable. He played a pivotal role in introducing the Chinese classics to the Western world, fostering cross-cultural understanding and appreciation. His translations continue to be used by scholars, students, and enthusiasts around the globe.

James Legge's journey into the heart of ancient Chinese literature was not merely an academic pursuit but a testament to his deep respect for Chinese culture and his unwavering belief in the power of knowledge. Through his meticulous translations of the Chinese classics, he became a bridge between East and West, paving the way for a greater understanding and appreciation of Chinese philosophy and culture. His legacy as a scholar and translator continues to inspire and guide generations of scholars and students who seek to explore the rich tapestry of human thought and civilization.



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