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# THE GREAT LEARNING & THE DOCTRINE OF THE MEAN

## The Chinese Classic Translated

by

James Legge

大学 中庸

中国儒家经典

[ 苏格兰 ] 理雅各 译



Liaoning People's Publishing House, China

辽宁人民出版社





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## James Legge (translator of the book)

James Legge (1815-1897) was a Scottish sinologist, missionary, and scholar, best known as an early and prolific translator of Classical Chinese texts into English. Convinced of the need for missionaries to be able to comprehend the ideas and culture of the Chinese, he began in 1841 a translation in many volumes of *the Chinese classics*, a monumental task that he completed a few years before his death.

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And Bedside Chinese Classics

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## General Preface

Millions of Chinese are learning English to acquire knowledge and skills for communication in a world where English has become the primary language for international discourse. Yet not many learners have come to realize that the command of the English language also enables them to have an easy access to the world literary classics such as Shakespeare's plays, Shelley's poems, Mark Twain's novels and Nietzsche's works which are an important part of liberal-arts education. The most important goals of universities are not vocational, that is, not merely the giving of knowledge and the training of skills.

In a broad sense, education aims at broadening young people's mental horizon, cultivating virtues and shaping their character. Lincoln, Mao Zedong and many other great leaders and personages of distinction declared how they drew immense inspiration and strength from literary works. As a matter of fact, many of them had aspired to become writers in their young age. Alexander the Great (356-323 B.C.) is said to take along with him two things, waking or sleeping: a book and a dagger, and the book is *Iliad*, a literary classic, by Homer. He would put these two much treasured things under his pillow when he went to bed.

Today, we face an unprecedented complex and changing world. To cope with this rapid changing world requires not only communication skills, but also adequate knowledge of cultures other than our own home culture. Among the most important developments in present-day global culture is the ever increasing cultural exchanges and understanding between different nations and peoples. And one of the best ways to know foreign cultures is to read their literary works, particularly their literary classics, the soul of a country's culture. They also give you the best language and the feeling of sublimity.

Liaoning People's Publishing House is to be congratulated for its foresight and courage in making a new series of world literary classics ( Bedside Classics) available to the reading public. It is hoped that people with an adequate command of the English language will read them, like them and keep them as their lifetime companions.

I am convinced that the series will make an important contribution to the literary education of the young people in China. At a time when the whole country is emphasizing "spiritual civilization", it is certainly a very timely venture to put out the series of literary classics for literary and cultural education.

Zhang Zhongzai

Professor

Beijing Foreign Studies University

July, 2013 Beijing



## 总 序

经典名著的语言无疑是最凝练、最优美、最有审美价值的。雪莱的那句“如冬已来临，春天还会远吗？”让多少陷于绝望的人重新燃起希望之火，鼓起勇气，迎接严冬过后的春天。徐志摩一句“悄悄的我走了，正如我悄悄的来；我挥一挥衣袖，不带走一片云彩”又让多少人陶醉。尼采的那句“上帝死了”，又给多少人以振聋发聩的启迪作用。

读经典名著，尤其阅读原汁原味作品，可以怡情养性，增长知识，加添才干，丰富情感，开阔视野。所谓“经典”，其实就是作者所属的那个民族的文化积淀，是那个民族的灵魂缩影。英国戏剧泰斗莎士比亚的《哈姆雷特》和《麦克白》等、“意大利语言之父”的但丁的《神曲》之《地狱篇》《炼狱篇》及《天堂篇》、爱尔兰世界一流作家詹姆斯·乔伊斯的《尤利西斯》及《一个艺术家的肖像》等、美国风趣而笔法超一流的著名小说家马克·吐温的《哈克历险记》以及《汤姆索亚历险记》等，德国著名哲学家尼采的《查拉图斯特拉如是说》及《快乐的科学》等等，都为塑造自己民族的文化积淀，做出了永恒的贡献，也同时向世界展示了他们所属的民族的优美剪影。

很多著名领袖如林肯、毛泽东等伟大人物，也都曾从经典名著中汲取力量，甚至获得治国理念。耶鲁大学教授查尔斯·希尔曾在题为《经典与治国理念》的文章，阐述了读书与治国之间的绝妙关系。他这样写道：

“在几乎所有经典名著中，都可以找到让人叹为观止、深藏其中的治国艺术原则。”

经典名著，不仅仅有治国理念，更具提升读者审美情趣的功能。世界上不同时代、不同地域的优秀经典作品，都存在一个共同属性：歌颂赞美人间的真善美，揭露抨击世间的假恶丑。

读欧美自但丁以来的经典名著，你会看到，西方无论是在漫长的黑暗时期，抑或进入现代进程时期，总有经典作品问世，对世间的负面，进行冷峻的批判。与此同时，也有更多的大家作品问世，热情讴歌人间的真诚与善良，使读者不由自主地沉浸于经典作品的审美情感之中。

英语经典名著，显然是除了汉语经典名著以外，人类整个进程中至关重要的文化遗产的一部分。从历史上看，英语是全世界经典阅读作品中，使用得最广泛的国际性语言。这一事实，没有产生根本性变化。本世纪相当长一段时间，这一事实也似乎不会发生任何变化。而要更深入地了解并切身感受英语经典名著的风采，阅读原汁原味的英语经典作品的过程，显然是必不可少的。

辽宁人民出版社及时并隆重推出“最经典英语文库”系列丛书，是具有远见与卓识的出版行为。我相信，这套既可供阅读，同时也具收藏价值的英语原版经

典作品系列丛书，在帮助人们了解什么才是经典作品的同时，也一定会成为广大英语爱好者、大中学生以及学生家长们的挚爱的“最经典英语文库”。

北京外国语大学英语学院  
北外公共外交研究中心  
欧美文学研究中心主任  
全国英国文学学会名誉会长

张中载 教授  
2013年7月于北京

## General Preface to *The Bedside Chinese Classics*

*The Four Books* and *The Five Classics* are the fundamental core of Confucianism, which have long been part of Chinese culture together with the thoughts, values and ethics embodied in them. *The Four Books* includes *Confucian Analects*, *The Works of Mencius*, *The Great Learning*, and *The Doctrine of the Mean*; and *The Five Classics* involves *The She King* (Classic of Poetry), *The Shoo King* (Book of Historical Documents), *The Li Ki* (Book of Rites), *The Yi King* (I Ching) and *The Ch'un Ts'ew* (Spring and Autumn Annals). To some extent, the Confucius classics represented by *The Four Books* and *The Five Classics* are the source of Chinese thought and culture over thousands of years, which have shaped China as what the nation it is and the Chinese people as who they are.

We have already stepped out of the ancient times into the modern period. For various reasons, we had once intentionally given up the traditional way of studying and reading these classics. However, the spirit of the classics, lodged in the deep hidden place of each Chinese soul, has never disappeared into thin air; and the candlelight of the thought has never died off, still streaming out



in the veins of Chinese people. Nowadays, there is an emphasis on the reflections of reviving Chinese culture, marching on to Chinese tradition and regaining Chinese heritage, which is of course drawn from Chinese people's recognition of the inherent cultural source. Obviously, the right way to return to traditions is to reread and study the Chinese classics our ancestors had left behind.

Naturally, today we don't review *The Chinese Classics* as our ancestors did for a better career. Rather, we should adopt an entirely new attitude and methods to read them in a broader context of the global culture. Legge's English version of *The Four Books* and *The Five Classics* more than one hundred years before should definitely be one of our choices. Legge's version especially enjoys its uniqueness. Besides the original Chinese characters and the corresponding English version, there is many an irreplaceable substantial critical note in every book, thus elevating his version to an academic level.

At the end of 1845, the Scottish missionary James Legge (1815-1897) went back to England from Hong Kong for illness and did not return until July 1848. On his way back to Hong Kong, Legge decided to translate Chinese classics with careful deliberation. He started with *The Four Books*, then *The Five Classics*, and then other classics in Taoism and Buddhism. In the eleven years between 1861 and 1872, Legge translated *The Four Books* and *The She King (Classic of Poetry)*, *The Shoo King (Book of Historical Documents)* and *The Ch'un Ts'ew (Spring and Autumn Annals)* in *The Five*

*Classics*, which were published successively by the London Mission Society Press in Hong Kong entitled *The Chinese Classics*. In 1879, Legge finished translating *The Yi King (I Ching)* and *The Li Ki (Book of Rites)*, which were included in *The Sacred Books of the East* published by the Clarendon Press in London, edited by Max Müller, an expert on Comparative Religion and Orientalism at Oxford University. Thus, Legge became the first westerner to translate all the books in *The Four Books* and *The Five Classics* on his own. More than thirty years later, the Clarendon Press had *The Chinese Classics* reprinted, but Legge only revised the first and second volumes. Besides *The Four Books* and *The Five Classics*, Legge also translated other Chinese classics such as *The Hsiao King (Classic of Filial Piety)*, *The Tao Teh King (Tao Te Ching)*, etc.

When Legge translated *The Four Books* and *The Five Classics*, a Chinese named Wang Tao helped him a lot. Wang Tao (1828-1897) was born in Suzhou in the Daoguang period of the Qing Dynasty. He passed the imperial examination at the county level in 1845 and went to work at London Missionary Society Press in Shanghai in 1849 at the request of an English missionary Walter Henry Medhurst (1796-1857). There Wang Tao devoted thirteen years to the work of translating English books into Chinese, contributing a lot to the introduction of western learning into China. In 1862, for his support of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom (1851-1864), Wang Tao was wanted by the Qing Dynasty and fled to Hong

Kong, where he got help from Legge, the then dean of Ying Wa College in Hong Kong and, in turn, he assisted Legge in his work of translating Chinese classics, hence starting a much-told story in the cultural exchanges between the East and the West.

From 1868 to 1870, Wang Tao stayed in Scotland with Legge, during which they worked together and completed the translation of such classics as *The She King (Classic of Poetry)*, *The Yi King (I Ching)* and *The Li Ki (Book of Rites)*. In 1870, they returned to Hong Kong, Legge resuming his work at Ying Wa College. After work, they continued to translate and write. In 1873, Legge settled down back in England and Wang Tao bought the printing equipment of the college. Next year, Wang Tao started *Tsun Wan Yat Po*, the first successful Chinese newspaper invested by a Chinese in the world. Wang Tao was therefore regarded as "the first Chinese newspaperman". In 1879, Wang Tao was invited to conduct investigations in Japan for four months. In 1884, he returned to Shanghai after over twenty years and became dean of Polytechnic College till his death in May 1897. It happened that Legge passed away in England in December that same year. Some 150 years ago, the two thinkers from different countries and cultural backgrounds became intimate friends for love of cultural transmission, leaving a touching anecdote in the history of cultural exchanges between the East and the West.

In the more than 150 years since the first edition of Legge's *The Chinese Classics* was published, some

Chinese classics including *The Four Books* and *The Five Classics* have been rendered into English, but Legge's version remains to be a standard, serving as the most authentic canon for westerners to understand the Oriental civilization and Chinese culture, as well as the Chinese national ethics. And without any shadow of a doubt, its meaning as a milestone has been clearer as time goes by. Since returning to England, Legge had been a professor of Sinology at Oxford for more than twenty years. His translation of Chinese classics and his teaching career have played a vital role in the establishment of Sinology as a discipline and had a positive effect on the development of Western Sinology. Legge's contribution is a milepost in transmitting the Eastern learning to the West and in the cultural exchanges between the East and the West.

Today, with the inevitable trend of globalization and the increasing international communication, the exchanges between the East and the West are much more expanded. However, there are still some barriers impossible to surmount in the communication, and, in a sense, we are confronted with the same problems Legge once had more than a hundred years ago. For example, how should one deal with the differences and conflicts in different civilizations, what attitude should one adopt in face of heterogeneous civilizations, and the like. In addition, for a nation with a long traditional culture like ours, such problems as how to handle the differences and conflicts between modern civilization



and ancient traditions and how we modern people should communicate with traditions still exist. Therefore, in rereading Legge's translation of *The Chinese Classics* and reviewing his academic achievements, I'd like to cast my eyes on the starting point of Legge's epoch-making work to learn about his attitude and position in dealing with China, Chinese culture and the traditional Chinese classics represented by *The Four Books* and *The Five Classics*.

In the age when Legge decided to translate Chinese classics, China did not have an equal position in its communication with the West. Western countries started their communication with China by resorting to force in the war, so they were more active and commanding, while China was passive and weak. In this case, Legge deserves our particular respect and praise because he had always adopted an objective, modest, prudent and unbiased attitude in his translation and research of Chinese classics. His sense of equality and tolerance set a good example in world cultural exchanges.

Undoubtedly, Legge's equal and objective attitude towards Chinese classics has a lot to do with his identity of being a faithful Christian missionary, which had shaped his character and integrity. He started to study and translate Chinese classics in order to spread Christianity better in China. In the second volume of the first edition of *The Chinese Classics*, Legge pointed out the necessity to translate Chinese Confucius classics, stating that this was an important way for other countries