

Rejoicing in the Twelve Days of Christmas
with Touchstones to the Life and Works of James Legge (1815-1897)

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My purpose in adopting this form of reflection during this wonderful time of year for Christians this year is to anticipate the bicentennial of James Legge's 理雅各 birth in 2015, and so to honor the wise plans of our Sovereign God. It was the Trinitarian Lord Who led that Scottish Congregational missionary to take up his posts first in Malacca (1840-1842) as a faculty member of the Anglo-Chinese College (*Yīng Huá Shūyuán* 英華書院), and soon afterwards as the Principal of the Anglo-Chinese College resituated in the newly created colony of Hong Kong (1842-1868) as an "agent" and senior missionary of the London Missionary Society. Each of these situations was something Legge himself firmly received as the heavenly calling he was to fulfill for the glory of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, and involved unexpected changes and some difficult transitions that were part and parcel of being a Protestant missionary in Chinese settings, what others within Christian communities before him and afterwards would consider nothing less than becoming a Christian hero. Legge himself would refer to these as the Supreme Lord's "providential plan".

Convictions about the Sovereign Lord's providences helped Legge to endure the death of his first wife, Mary Isabella Legge (d. 1853), as well as three of his children during the first two decades of his time in Malacca and Hong Kong, as well as to continue to pursue his life-long pursuit of being a missionary-scholar pleasing to the Living God and honorable to all, including the Chinese intellectuals and Chinese local residents whom he sought to serve and draw toward the salvation of our August Heavenly Supreme Lord (*huángtiān shàngdì* 皇天上帝), the King of kings (*wànwáng zhī wáng* 萬王之王). All the cultural and political cross-cultural nuances and (mis)understandings of those titles of our Trinitarian majesty were worked out through the nearly three decades that Legge served as a missionary-scholar in Hong Kong for the LMS.

After having entered into retirement to complete the final two volumes of his *Chinese Classics* (*The Book of Poetry* (*Shījīng* 詩經) and *The Spring and Autumn Annals* with its *Zuǒ Commentary* (*Chūnqiū Zuǒzhuàn* 春秋左傳), published in 1871 and 1872 respectively), Legge was in a rather uncomfortable situation of seeking to look forward to other possibilities that were still largely unforeseeable. Under providential guidance once again, Dr. Legge was rather unexpectedly requested to take up the post of being the single English pastor of Union Church (1870-1873). As

many would know, he had previously he had served as a bilingual missionary-pastor (in Cantonese and English), sharing those duties with his Chinese co-pastor, Ho Tsun-sheen (何進善 1817-1871). As it happened, Pastor Ho would go to receive his heavenly rewards when he passed away some months after Pastor Legge arrived back in Hong Kong. Legge's Chinese co-pastor had been suffering from intense spiritual and psychological traumata experienced during a cruel arson attack and mob violence expressed against a church community Pastor Ho had helped to establish as a missionary outpost in the city of Fóshān 佛山市 ("Buddha Mountain" City, Cantonese: *Fat Saān Sih*) in Guǎngdōng province in the late fall of 1870. While Pastor Ho and many others were in the building, a large crowd gathered around the church while they were singing Christian hymns of worship in an inaugural worship service within that newly built sanctuary in that town. With a local fire-fighter team present, but willfully unresponsive, they set the church building ablaze, and publicly humiliated those who ran out of the building further by beating them as they ran away, all to punish them for daring to set up a Christian community in their town! Pastor Ho managed to escape out of a backside window, and so did not suffer the physical brutality other Christians from Hong Kong and the local town faced that day. Nevertheless, he had to make the trip back to Hong Kong on foot, obviously with some sense of trepidation, fully aware of cultural clashes that anti-Christian Chinese persons in that town could mount against the fledgling groups of bold and sacrificial Chinese Christians who had made the mission to Fóshān and the building of that Chinese Protestant sanctuary possible.

This was the context which Legge encountered when he returned in early 1870 to take up his pastor ministry at Union Church.

As Legge himself would have wanted it, the following reflections are meant not to detract from proper meditations that should accompany these days during the Christian season, but to garnish them with some new awareness of the incarnational form of ministry that he adopted within Hong Kong throughout his missionary-scholar and pastor-scholar careers, leading him ultimately into taking up the opportunity to become Oxford's first professor of Chinese language and literature in 1876. Almost all of these notes have been written from memory, and so if there are any errors in factual information, I and my poor memory are the sources of those mistakes, in spite of efforts to check some details where I was not completely certain.

First Day of Christmas: 26 December 2014

Biblical Verses for Reading and Meditation: Psalm 96: 1-3; Acts 17: 24-28

The first Christian-Chinese parallel calendar was produced by the Rev. Dr. Legge and Pastor Ho in 1844, printed in a pamphlet accompanied by various essays on Christian

themes, and published in the imperial yellow cover that was the standard for all such almanacs produced during the Qīng dynasty. It was bold and risky enough. Prudence dictated that they should only do it that one time, and so that is what happened.

Second Day of Christmas: 27 December 2014

Biblical Verses for Reading and Meditation: Psalm 53: 1-5; Romans 12: 17-21
With his Chinese co-pastor, the Rev. Ho Tsun-sheen, Legge supported the establishment of Chinese Christian churches in the towns of Poklo (Bóluó 博羅, starting in 1861) and Fatshan (Fóshān, independently started under the leadership of the Rev. Ho in the late 1860s). Notably, both Pastor Legge and the Rev. Ho suffered public persecutions due to these efforts, but did so without revenge, though they sought legal recourse under prevailing laws.

Third Day of Christmas: 28 December 2014

Biblical Verses for Reading and Meditation: Proverbs 22: 29; Acts 23:12 – 24:16
In 1845, James Legge and his young family were physically ill, suffering from some disease contracted in Hong Kong, and so received permission to return to Great Britain for their first furlough since travelling toward Asian settings in 1839. Determining that they might still be able to continue their ministries to some promising young male students through the ministry of their Scottish pastor in the small town of Huntly while they recuperated, the Legges arranged to have their Chinese maid and the three male students join them on the long trip back to London and ultimately to Aberdeenshire in Scotland, taking a ship for several months as it travelled around the Cape of Good Hope.

During their stay, the Rev. Hill taught them well, and ultimately during the one of the subsequent Christmas seasons all three young Chinese boys were baptized in the Free Church in Huntly. So unusual was their presence, and so notable was their Christian profession, that during the last year before they returned to Hong Kong, Legge and the three students were invited often to various Protestant congregations throughout Great Britain, sharing in worship services by sharing their personal testimonies and requests for intercessions as they anticipated returning to Hong Kong. Weeks before they departed, the young Queen Victoria welcomed all four to an audience with her husband, Prince Albert. This remarkable event – a Nonconformist missionary with young Chinese Christian converts in the presence of the official Head of the Anglican Church – was recorded by a highly regarded painter. One part of that painting, focusing on the portrayal of those three Chinese Christian students, has been integrated into the Hong Kong postage stamp published in 1994 to honor the Scottish missionary-scholar.

Notably, these three students were not only studying at the Anglo-Chinese College, but were also members of the early congregation of Union Church.

Fourth Day of Christmas: 29 December 2014

Biblical Verses for Reading and Meditation: 2 Corinthians 4: 1-12

James Legge's first major classical sinological publication was of the Ruist ("Confucian") scripture referred to as *The Four Books* (*Sìshū* 四書). Consisting of four ancient scriptures brought together to form a single foundation for the renewal of the Ruist tradition in the 12th century of our Christian era by the notable Ruist scholar, Zhū Xī 朱熹 (1130-1200), it was interpreted so that a new and practical vision of whole person cultivation could be conceived and put into practice.

First published in 1861 in a bilingual Chinese-English format and published by the Anglo-Chinese College Press in Hong Kong, it was not free from controversy because Legge was harshly critical of Master Kǒng or "Confucius", but found Master Mèng to be a "philosopher" fully worthy of Anglophone readers' consideration. In addition, Legge did not follow the strict order of the four texts as presented in the imperially authorized version of *The Four Books*. Nevertheless, it was these two volumes that became the basis for his later sinological fame, being the texts most often published and republished long after he himself had passed away in 1897.

A second edition that was significantly revised was produced in 1893 and published in Oxford by the Clarendon Press. In fact, it is generally this version that is republished by various publishers, and is still able to be purchased (sometimes in two volumes, other times in a single large and relatively fat volume) even now, two hundred years after his birth. More significantly, within this revised version, Legge manifested a changed evaluation of Confucius, finding him to be a "great man" and one from whom Christians could also learn some "good lessons". This change was not done capriciously or superficially, but was the result of years of study in Confucian commentarial literature and scholarly works, revealing what a "sympathetic but not neutral" openness of a Christian intellectual could achieve.

The Four Books include (in the order Legge published them) *The Analects* (*Lúnyǔ* 論語) – a name Legge himself created for this work, which has been the standard title in English ever since – as well as *The Great Learning* (*Dàxué* 大學), *The Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhōngyōng* 中庸, an English title which he later revised in 1885 to become *The State of Equilibrium and Harmony*), and the largest of the four Ruist scriptures, *The Mencius* (*Mèngzǐ* 孟子).

Fifth Day of Christmas: 30 December 2014

Biblical Verses for Reading and Meditation: Luke 16: 10-12

When removing from Malacca to the newly created British colony of Hong Kong in the latter part of the summer of 1842, Legge and four others from the Anglo-Chinese College in Malacca relocated to the new colony. Initially their classes were held in the Legge's home, but within a little more than a year a building was erected so that they could continue lessons in another part of the building which included the London Missionary Society's offices and the residence of the Legge family. Those who moved with Legge to Hong Kong included the elderly evangelist, Leung Faat (Liáng Fā 梁發), his Chinese teacher and colleague, not yet ordained, Mr. Ho Tsun-sheen 何進善, and two students. It was a small beginning for what would become a major institution within Hong Kong. Though Legge determined to close the Anglo-Chinese College and its attached seminary in 1856, the school was reopened in Hong Kong during the 1920s, and is now located and operating on Oxford Road in Kowloon, with a student population of more than one thousand students.

Sixth Day of Christmas / New Year's Eve: 31 December 2014

Biblical Verses for Reading and Meditation: Psalm 22: 25-28

James Legge had what we might refer to as a “double family”: one with two surviving daughters through his first wife, Mary Isabella Legge (1815-1853), and a second with four children – two sons and two daughters – with his second wife, Hannah Mary Legge (c. 1822-1882). Among his six children, one of the eldest daughters married a man named Horatio Lay, who made his name by serving as a Chinese interpreter during the signing of the treaties for the second Opium War in 1861. One of his sons, James Granville Legge, later became a national official in the Education Ministry in Great Britain. Also notable was the fact that it was one of his younger daughters, Edith Legge, who later wrote the hagiographic biography of her father, *James Legge, Missionary and Scholar*, published in 1905.

Seventh Day of Christmas / New Year's Day A.D. 2015

Biblical Verses for Reading and Meditation:

Psalm 119: 164-5; Deuteronomy 5: 12-15; Malachi 3: 10; 2 Corinthians 9: 6-8

The cycle of the seven-day week which included a day devoted to worship was a Christian cultural rhythm for life, what has been referred to as “Sabbath culture” (*ānxīrì wénhuà* 安息日文化).

Notably, it was not that a seven-day week was completely foreign to Chinese patterns of calendrical time, because lunar calendars were usually organized into 28 days, and so divided into four groups of seven days. Because there were significant differences between the solar and lunar forms of timing that were recognized by Chinese astronomers, they added special months during various years in order to

compensate for the temporal gap that was naturally created within the lunar year and the shift of the seasons. So cycles of seven-day weeks were not unrecognizable to Chinese persons who came into contact with foreign missionaries, but they were easily befuddled by the fact that those weeks started on different days than the lunar calendar weeks, and so needed to be explained.

More culturally significant were the Christian days of worship, which Legge referred to as “the Christian Sabbath” in a series of three published English sermons produced as a little booklet in 1850 in Hong Kong. In the 1840s it was still the case that the vast majority of Chinese persons did not understand at all the religious connections of those “Western” Sundays to the biblical doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus Christ – for almost all of them had never previously heard about the person of Jesus of Nazareth at all, or of the various kinds of Christianity which had come into Chinese worlds in different ages. What was most strange was the fact that those modern European and North American missionaries representing Protestant forms of Christianity required that Chinese converts or interested seekers should not continue to do their everyday routines and work, but devote themselves to the rituals of worship, the study of the “Sacred Scriptures” (*Shèngjīng* 聖經, or in a literal manner they might consider to mean something like the “Holy Sutra”), and doing acts of mercy and compassion that were distinctive of modern Protestant Christian life.

What Legge underscored in his third sermon dealing with “The Christian Sabbath in the Colonies”, was the fact that many Chinese persons were confused by the “Red-haired ghosts” who themselves did not follow the “Sabbath rules” promoted by missionaries such as Legge. Knowing that many of the foreign merchants claimed to be Christians, he confronted them with the fact that they often worked their Chinese laborers on Sundays, and so contradicted the Christian interpretation of the fourth of the Ten Commandments (“Remember to keep the Sabbath holy . . .”). In addition, they were easily tempted by greed, so that they justified many immoral actions on the basis of wanting to “make a better profit” and taking advantage of others because of the monetary power they could wield.

So, Legge challenged the Christian expatriates to take up their cultural role in witnessing to their identification with Christ and promoting the transformative cultural power of the Christian Sabbath. To Chinese Christians he set forth another kind of spiritual challenge. Others around them would argue that they could only lose money by not working on the seventh day of the week; Pastors Legge and Ho challenged them to pray before the Lord of the heavens and the earth to bless them spiritually, intellectually, and even financially. They argued: test God and see. Because they devoted themselves exclusively to “doing God’s will” by “keeping the Sabbath holy” for that one day of the week, let God enrich their economic life as well,

and so prove that the Supreme Lord was truly the sovereign over the whole of life.

Those lessons and challenges, of course, are still valid today.

Eighth Day of Christmas: 2 January 2015

Biblical Verses for Reading and Meditation: Matthew 5: 3-12; 7: 24-27

Several times as one of the pastors of Union Church, Legge presented a sequence of sermons on the Eight Beatitudes. During one of those times in the mid-1850s a young apprentice evangelist named Hóng Réngān 洪仁玕 (1822-1864) was deeply impressed by those teachings, and continued to meditate on their spiritual profundity. What was unusual about this young and capable Chinese man, as Pastors Legge and Ho knew along with many other Chinese persons residing in Hong Kong, was that he was a younger cousin of the person who had taken on the title of the “King of the Heavenly Kingdom of Supreme Peace”, that is, of the *Tàipíng Tiānguó* 太平天國. They had captured and occupied the major city of Nánjīng 南京 (“Southern Capital”) in 1853, and renamed it Tiānjīng 天京, or “the Heavenly Capital”. When Legge returned to Great Britain for his second furlough in 1858, the bright and promising apprentice evangelist determined to travel northward to Tiānjīng, and so to see if he could win the his older cousin’s allegiance to the Christian Savior. Leaving his family and relatives in the care of the LMS missionaries, including John Chalmers (another later pastor of Union Church), Hóng Réngān left and never again returned. He was quickly elevated to the level of one of the *Tàipíng* “kings”, given the title of the “Shield King” (*Gānwáng* 干王), and so given a palatial residence in Tiānjīng where he could organize his plans in seeking to transform the forces of the *Tàipíng* king into soldiers supporting the international Christian world. To emphasize this new kind of spiritual concern, it is said that the Shield King place a Chinese version of the Eight Beatitudes on the gate to his own palace.

By the time Legge had returned to Hong Kong in 1859, there were still hopes that something might come of this bold effort to change the *Tàipíng* Insurgency into some form of Chinese Christianity. Yet within a year, more details began to emerge that showed that the Shield King was unable to fulfill his dream, and was now militarily and politically committed to supporting the *Tàipíng* king’s heterodox visions. Having sent a bag of money to the missionary-scholars in Hong Kong who were caring for his family, that is James Legge and John Chalmers, Legge had refused to accept it, claiming that it was money earned by immoral means, and so it was sent back to the Heavenly Capital. For this, Legge was referred to among those Chinese persons who knew about this event as “the righteous man Legge”.

Later during the final battles of the *Tàipíng* Rebellion, the Shield King, Hóng Réngān, was caught by Qīng forces many weeks after the Heavenly Capital was

overrun by Qīng and foreign armies opposing the Táipíng armies. He was found protecting the teenage son of the Táipíng king, seeking to preserve the lineage of that notable rebellion. Both were forced to write their stories as a form of official record, and then were summarily executed.

Many years later Legge wrote about his “reminiscences” in Hong Kong, and told about his close relationship to Hóng Réngān, considering his later choices to join the Táipíng forces and his subsequent execution to be part of a great tragedy that took place during the latter half of 19th century Chinese history.

Ninth Day of Christmas: 3 January 2015

Biblical Verses for Reading and Meditation:

Ecclesiastes 12: 13-14; Romans 12: 18; Colossians 2: 6-10

It was the vision of James Legge to complete an English version of the whole of the Ruist (“Confucian”) Scriptures, so that a more complete understanding of the main ideology that shaped Qīng culture could be studied and introduced to later missionaries and scholars, both inside and outside of China. Those Chinese canonical works involved nine classical works. Besides *The Four Books* mentioned previously, and produced initially in 1861, *The Book of Historical Documents* (*Shūjīng* 書經, published in 1865), *The Book of Poetry* (*Shījīng* 詩經, published in 1871), *The Spring and Autumn Annals* with its *Zuo Commentary* (*Chūnqiū* and *Zuǒzhuàn* 春秋左傳, published in 1872), *The Book of Changes* and its *Ten Commentaries* (*Yījīng* and *Shíyì* 易經十翼, published in 1882), and finally the two volume set of *The Records of the Rites* (*Lǐjì* 禮記, published in 1885). These were originally produced in eleven sizeable volumes, with a pair of volumes involved for every work except for *The Book of Changes*.

As far as we know, there has been no other person outside of China and East Asian cultures who has studied and translated all these scriptures into other foreign languages. The two persons who have come closest are both Jesuit missionaries: the French Jesuit missionary-scholar, Séraphin Couvreur 顧賽芬 (1835-1919) and the Portuguese Jesuit missionary-scholar, Joaquim Angélico de Jesus Guerra 戈振東 (1908-1993). Couvreur spent fifty years in northeastern China and published complete French translations of all the Ruist Scriptures except for *The Book of Changes* (also providing Latin translations for most of them). In Guerra’s case, he had an eventful life spent in Macau, southeastern China, and later in Portugal, but returned to Macau after his retirement to pursue his massive translation project. Due to support he received from the government of Macau in covering costs for their publication, Guerra managed in just nine years to produce renderings of all the above texts except the “Ten Wings” or commentaries to *The Book of Changes*. For both of these

missionary-scholars, Legge had set the precedent that they hoped to match and exceed, if that was possible.

Tenth Day of Christmas: 4 January 2015

Biblical Verses for Reading and Meditation: Exodus 20: 2-17; Romans 13: 8-10. Being raised in Scottish Christian traditions, Legge as a young student was required to learn by heart the 107 questions of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, produced by Scottish Protestant intellectuals in the mid-17th century in their effort to produce a Christian form of culture largely inspired by Calvinist precedents. At least half of those questions deal with the content and interpretation of the Decalogue, or what have been also called the Mosaic Ten Commandments. Strongly biblical in their content, the philosophical principles employed to interpret these major biblical texts are found in the Westminster Larger Catechism, revealing their self-conscious effort to create a form of Christian culture that was built upon rational principles standing apart from Roman Catholic precedents.

Notably, Legge himself produced a series of sermons on the Ten Commandments while the missionary-pastor of Union Church, and presented them more than once, probably also during his years as the pastor of the English congregation of Union Church from 1870 to 1873. His approach was not so much inspired by Calvin's theology, and his interpretations were not as detailed with rules and conditions as found in those notable Scottish precedents mentioned above, but he clearly recognized their value as commands that helped to create a Christian form of life.

Of special cultural interest is the fact that the term "cross" had no single character to render it in Chinese language, but the way it is named is through reference to the common term for the number ten, which is *shí*十 (Cantonese *sàhp*) in Chinese languages. What one actually says in Chinese when referring to "the cross" is "the structure [shaped in the form] of [the] character ten" (*shízìjiǎ* 十字架). This has become a standard translation completely understood as an independent word in Christian language in Chinese, and is now in the 21st century regularly understood outside of Chinese Christian circles as well, and generally linked up to a form of capital punishment in imperial Roman times. Nevertheless, in the 19th century when James Legge and his family arrived in Hong Kong in 1842, it would not have been linked to the Roman culture and its cruel punishment of crucifixion by the vast majority of early 19th century Chinese persons. In fact, to talk about "crucifixion" in Chinese is to describe the process: "to be nailed to the structure [in the form] of [the] character ten". Those are the translations that continue to be expressed in Chinese Christian churches to this day.

Eleventh Day of Christmas: 5 January 2015

Biblical Verses for Reading and Meditation: 2 Timothy 2: 14-15; Romans 12: 1-2
Two days earlier we learned that Legge was one of the very few persons outside of Chinese and East Asian contexts who offered foreign renderings of all the nine major Ruist (“Confucian”) canonical works.

In fact, however, Legge added to that long list of important English renderings of Ruist Scriptures two other volumes presenting classics chosen from the complicated Daoist traditions. These consisted primarily of English renderings of the *Dàodéjīng* 道德經 and *The Zhuāngzǐ* 莊子; those two major renderings were supplemented by translations of seven or eight smaller “tractates” which formed the last portion of the second volume. All of those tractates had been produced during the 10th or 11th century of the Christian era, and had become very popular in various kinds of Daoist religious traditions.

Speaking comprehensively, these eleven volumes of English renderings of Ruist and Daoist teachings – what we now would refer to as Ruist and Daoist “canons-in-translation” for Anglophone audiences – was a monument to Legge’s sinological scholarship. They were based upon a Christian principle for studying other religious traditions, where he sought to understand their claims with an attitude that was “sympathetic but not neutral”.

Twelfth Day of Christmas / Epiphany / Three Kings’ Holiday: 6 January 2015

Biblical Verses for Reading and Meditation: 2 Corinthians 5: 11-21
On this day many Christians in various different cultures celebrate the coming of the three kings to Bethlehem. They were “three kings” or “three wise men”, now generally considered to have been sages or magi from what we now would refer to as Persia.

Remarkably, after some years being spent in Oxford as the first Professor of Chinese language and literature, he and two others were portrayed as “Oxford’s Eastern Sages”. When they were caricatured in sketches that presented them in costumes resembling more what was seen on 19th century theatrical stages in Great Britain than in the lands which they represented. (See the image copied from Norman J. Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China: James Legge’s Oriental Pilgrimage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 168.) The three “Eastern Sages” of Oxford’s teaching faculties were Friedrich Max Müller, the Sanskritist, Archibald A. Sayce, the Assyriologist, and James Legge, the Sinologist. As with all sarcasm, there was a profound truth making the joke interesting, and there was no doubt that these three scholars were held in high esteem across the world in their era.

Nevertheless, this is not the whole story about James Legge. However anyone

else saw him, James Legge continued to claim that the highest calling he had was not as a sinologist, or a translator, or an interpreter. He saw instead his calling to be “an ambassador for Christ”, and so to use his various stations to seek to draw people to “be reconciled to God”. It was this very same idea that he brought to Union Church, and was presented in his first sermon to the small congregation, and also in 1864, during its 20th anniversary. The biblical text he employed in those times was verse 20 in the passage found above as today’s verse for reading and meditation. Would it not be worthy of memorization, so that we too may join in this high Christian calling?