

Considering Why James Legge 理雅各 (1815-1897) is Considered to be a Great Man

- He was one of the first modern Protestant missionaries to China who earned two Master Degrees before becoming a missionary. He first earned an MA from King's College, Aberdeen (later Aberdeen University) and an MDiv in missions from the Congregational seminary called Highbury College.
- Before Legge went to Malacca (1840-1842) with his young wife, Mary Isabella Legge, he studied Chinese with Samuel Kidd, a former missionary in Malacca; very few Protestant missionaries in those days had Chinese language training before they went to the mission field, and so Legge came to teach at the Anglo-Chinese College in Malacca with a stronger linguistic background than most other missionaries.
- Legge received two honorary doctorates. The first came from a university in the state of New York in the USA, for his part in producing an English version of a Cantonese novel, initially translated by a younger student and friend, Ho Tsun Sheen 何進善 and published in 1842. The second was presented to him in 1884 by the University of Edinburgh during its tricentennial celebrations, for his work in translating Chinese canonical literature.
- Outside of persons found in Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, James Legge is the first foreigner ever to translate all of the canonical texts of the Ruist ("Confucian") tradition into a foreign language. He began the publication of these works in 1861, using the Anglo-Chinese College Press in Hong Kong, and completed the series while he was Professor of Chinese in Corpus Christi College, Oxford, in 1885.
- Legge not only translated Ruist canonical texts, but he also interpreted them as an informed Christian intellectual. His most prominent work in this realm was the book, *The Religions of China* (1880). This has been considered to be the first university textbook on Chinese religions in any European language.
- As an educator, Legge served as the principal of the Anglo-Chinese College and its seminary until they were closed by him in 1856. He also helped to initiate the public school system in Hong Kong with the founding of Central School. His first wife, Mary Isabella (d. 1853), helped to establish one of the first girl's schools in Hong Kong. Later in Oxford Legge served on committees that ending up establishing Somerville College for women and Mansfield College for

nonconformist (those who were not Anglican) Christians and others.

- Before leaving Hong Kong, Legge had become a kind of folk hero in Hong Kong, recognized for both his learning and courage, and always associated with the first Chinese Protestant martyr, Che Kam-Kwong 車金光, from the Cantonese town of Poklo 博羅, who was murdered in October 1861.
- Because of the monumental effort of Legge's missionary-scholar career which resulted in the publication of the work of eight-tomes-in-five-volumes entitled *The Chinese Classics*, Legge was given the first Prix Stanislas Julien in 1875, an international prize for the best work in Chinese studies. That prize continues to be held each year even to this day, after 140 years. So it is legitimate to argue that Legge stood at the pinnacle of Chinese scholarship in his own day.
- Due to the generosity of Legge's supporters among both expatriate and Chinese citizens of Hong Kong, a sizable amount of funds was collected to provide an economic foundation for any university that would take him as their faculty member. In the end, Corpus Christi College of Oxford accepted these funds, and the Legge Chair still exists in Oxford University to this day.
- Unlike any other sinologist before him, Legge immersed himself in the study of Chinese texts and commentaries. In his "copious notes" to *The Chinese Classics*, he cited by name and/or titles the works of over 300 Ruist scholars. These included works from the first major dynasty, the Han dynasty (c. 220 B.C. to 220 A.D.), and included figures from most other dynasties, up till his own day (during the Qing dynasty, 1645 – 1911). No one before him outside of East Asian contexts had ever done so much thorough scholarly work and annotated them with such regularity and discipline.