

A Survey of James Legge's Activities in China (1843-1873)

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Abstract: From 1843 to 1873, James Legge spent the best 30 years in his life in Hong Kong. He made various contributions to the education, newspaper industry, smoking cessation, anti-gambling, disaster relief and other public welfare undertakings in Hong Kong. James Legge spent more than 50 years building a bridge between China and the West. His life was from a missionary to a sinologist. His activities began with preaching Christianity to the East, but he was prominent in spreading Chinese culture to the West. Although it has been more than 100 years, James Legge's translation is still regarded as the standard translation of Chinese classics. He ended the amateur level research of Chinese literature by Western scholars and embarked on the road of specialization.

1. Introduction

James Legge (1815-1897) was a famous Scots scholar and missionary, known as the translator of Chinese classical literature, and one of the most important figures in the cultural exchange between China and the West in the 19th century. Legge shouldered the "sacred" mission of the London Society and traveled a long way to China to preach. He opposed the use of heavy ships and guns and bloody slaughter to open the door of China, and advocated the use of civilized means to thoroughly Westernize the Chinese people's thinking from the roots. For this reason, Legge was away from his hometown for 30 years to run activities in Hong Kong, China, tirelessly set up education, painstakingly published Chinese newspapers, worked hard to translate Chinese Classics, and studied Chinese culture with great difficulty. He hopes to achieve his goal of spreading Christianity in this way. However, contrary to his expectations, Legge's ultimate goal has finally come to nothing, and the various "activities" carried out to achieve this goal have been recorded forever in the annals of world culture. Legge was also honored as a missionary, educator, publisher, translator, and sinologist because of these activities in his life. This paper collects and sorts out the relevant historical materials and documents of Legge, and summarizes Legge's missionary activities, educational activities, translation activities, and Chinese cultural studies.

2. James Legge's Missionary Activities

James Legge first came to China as a missionary of London Evangelical Society, and he shouldered the "sacred" mission of spreading Christianity to Chinese people. Legge has never wavered in his faith in missionary work during his 30-odd years in Hong Kong. It can be said that missionary activities almost ran through James Legge's life.

2.1 Missionary Background

Huntly, Aberdeen Shire in Aberdeen, Scotland, the hometown of James Legge, is a particularly active place for missionary activities in Britain. Long before James Legge was born, there had been a religious movement in this area. Cowie, a priest with strong missionary consciousness in Aberdeen, proposed that all secular people can become priests, and all believers should leave their hometown for missionary activities in other regions and countries. It is precisely because of this

initiative that he had a conceptual conflict with the elder clan and was removed from the latter. Because he was convinced that God ruled everything, he created an independent church in Hendry, where believers' missionary ideas were very strong and persistent, and James Legge's parents were devout supporters. James Legge was born and brought up in such a family. When he was very young, his mother would recite hymns to him every day, and few of his enlightening teachers loved and adhered to the Old Testament. ^[4]Legge 1905: 16-17) In addition, from 1815 to 1822, his family members often exchanged letters with William Milne, a famous missionary in Malacca, and such letters were also the enlightenment objects that led James Legge into missionary work.

James Legge was deeply shocked by the overseas missionary work of Britain in that period, and vowed to become one of them. After finishing his studies, he missed an excellent job opportunity because he stood firm in his faith, and then chose to work as a math and Latin teacher in a Catholic school in Blackburn, England for a term of one and a half years. During this period, with the encouragement of the headmaster, Mr. Hoole, James Legge joined the local Catholic Church, and often went deep into the village schools with the headmaster to preach to the people. His repeated participation got him used to this way of life. In this process, James Legge began to plan his own life, and finally made up his mind to be a true Christian and go to other countries and regions for missionary activities. In 1837, James Legge entered Highbury Theological Seminary in London to study theology, which was the last time of his school education. ^[4] (Legge 1905: 20)

Undoubtedly, the era and environment in which James Legge lived, the upbringing and education he received, and the background of his non-state religion are all important reasons for his becoming a missionary. Influenced by the missionary thought of the Independent Church, the talented James Legge gave up the teaching position that he could easily obtain, but at this time he didn't realize that his intelligence could be used in missionary work and brought into full play. During his study at Burley Theological Seminary, he continued to preach in the countryside every Sunday, and made up his mind to preach abroad: "Pastors and missionaries are like soldiers of a country, and should go where they should go. I think I can be more effective in other countries during this period. My sense of responsibility drives me to make such a choice and helps to deepen my feelings with my family." ^[7] (Legge 1871: 74) James Legge's decision was not opposed or hindered. In 1838, he successfully joined the London Society and took the initiative to apply for missionary activities in China. However, because China was not open to Europe at that time, London Society had to approve James Legge to go to Southeast Asia to preach to overseas Chinese. In July 1839, James Legge and his wife Mary, who had just married, sailed for China by ship and arrived in Malacca, Nanyang on January 10, 1840.

2.2 Missionary Mission in Malacca

When James Legge was in Malacca, he worked as a teacher in Yinghua College. The original intention of the college was to preach. Although it was not built in China, the main source of the school was Chinese. During this period, James Legge not only carried out missionary activities, but also constantly developed Chinese into believers, and then joined the missionary cause. He Futong and He Jinshan were the first batch of Chinese who became missionaries under his training, and the latter also served as his translation assistant in the later period. With regard to such activities, James Legge said in his later letters: "Without the help of such figures, the development of missionary work will inevitably stagnate. In the past, missionaries' thoughts were too backward, their knowledge was scarce, and their energy was insufficient. However, they achieved great success. What is the reason? I think it is mainly because they were born in this land and all activities are carried out in their own country." ^[5] (Legge 1861: 13) James Legge deeply realized that in China, where Confucianism is rooted in the hearts of the people, missionaries must take the development of local believers as the key work, and only in this way can the missionary cause be better developed. In 1842, cholera broke out in this area and spread widely. The local people spent a lot of money and wanted to eradicate the disease through superstitious activities. James Legge specially compiled a prevention manual for the disease and preached to the local people about superstition. After that, he believed that his belief had been gradually recognized by the people.

3. Conclusion

As a missionary, James Legge shoulders the religious mission of spreading the gospel, which is his instinct to help western scholars understand China and get close to China, and it is also the internal motivation of his translation of Confucian classics into English. James Legge may not be aware of the role of his ancient classic translation project in bridging the East and the West. His actions paved the way for missionary work, but the final result was far beyond the scope of missionary work.

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