

The Translator as Innovative Sino-Christian Universal Thinker: James Legge's Dialogue with Zhu Xi in His *Confucian Analects*

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Abstract

James Legge (1815–1897) is a pioneering translator who extensively adopted Zhu Xi's (1130–1200) commentaries in his works. This article argues that Legge stands as a distinctive figure in Chinese translation history via his in-depth dialogue with Zhu's commentaries in his annotated *Chinese Classics*. He innovatively correlates the teachings of Confucius with Christianity via Zhu's system of thought. This article discusses three interrelated themes from Legge's Zhu-based annotation in his *Confucian Analects*. First, Legge uses Zhu's interpretation to show how Confucian learning (*xue* 學) identifies goodness (*shan* 善) as a phase from common good qualities to transcendent excellence, and how this Confucian view on goodness can be related to the Christian idea of the supreme good. Second, Legge adopts Zhu's thoughts on human selfish desires and heavenly principle (*tianli* 天理) in exploring the subject of "subduing one's self and returning to propriety" (*keji fuli* 克己復禮), in order to illumine the relevance of Confucian teachings to the Christian doctrines of original sin and divine grace. Finally, for Legge, Zhu's contemplation of nature conveys the vision of a universal creator that accords with the Christian image of God. Overall, through his dialogue with Zhu, Legge's *Analects* demonstrates a meaningful synthesis of central topics in Confucianism and Christianity, encouraging new thoughts on humanity, moral transcendence, and the universal world of the divine.

Keywords

James Legge, Zhu Xi, learning and goodness, original sin, heavenly principle, nature and God, Confucian-Christian dialogue