REVIEW

Marilyn Laura Bowman. *James Legge and the Chinese Classics: A Brilliant Scot in the Turmoil of Colonial Hong Kong*. Victoria: Friesen Press, 2016. Pp. viii and 614. ISBN 978-1-4602-8882-5. \$45.99.

James Legge (1815-97) was an important, now nearly forgotten Scottish translator of the classic Confucian texts that laid the bedrock of Chinese culture for hundreds of years. He was also a Protestant missionary, an educator and a scholar. With this volume, Marilyn Laura Bowman has crafted a tome worthy of Legge's decades-long work in Hong Kong, from the 1840s to the 1870s, and then as the first Chair of Chinese Language at Oxford, a position he held from 1876 until his death. At over 600 pages in length, the volume illuminates his legacy, carefully contextualizing it within some of the most turbulent years in modern Chinese history – years that marked the beginnings of China's "century of humiliation." Indeed, Legge arrived in Hong Kong in July 1843, less than two weeks after formal ratification of the Treaty of Nanking, which ceded Hong Kong to England in perpetuity. There, in the face of incredible odds, Legge forged an impressive body of work, against backdrops of foreign incursions into China, opium wars, banditry, civil war, natural disasters, poverty and disease. Legge was assisted in his ambitious program by men who gained great fame in their own right – for example, Hong Rengan (later a leader of the Taiping Rebellion), and Wang Tao (a renowned translator). Significantly, Legge's work on the Confucian texts occurred at a time when many Chinese were questioning their value and role in the decline of the Qing Empire.

To this reader, three significances stand out in the book, each underlining Legge's position as a cultural emissary. First is his work as an intellectual and translator. Legge left a formidable number of translations and Bowman rightly points out the importance of his lengthy commentaries on them, as he unpacks the meanings behind the dense texts, in multiple European languages. His empirical, scholarly approach to the classics constitutes a considerable contribution to Western scholarship that Bowman suggests reflects Scottish ideals of scholastic excellence that melded well with those of his Chinese counterparts. The second major significance is the focus on Legge as a missionary – not only in terms of his considerable activities, but also the support he received from the relatively progressive London Mission Society as well as the penury he endured as, for example, he was denied the children's allowances to which he was entitled. Bowman is particularly adept at describing the difficulties of life as a missionary and the challenges that Europeans like Legge faced. The third significance is Legge's dedication, or resilience, best epitomized by his decades-long career when disease often swept missionaries away after about seven years in China, with less than five years of active service – shocking statistics, considering the journey from Scotland to Hong Kong could take five months. Legge's first wife and four of his eleven children were lost to disease before his second wife packed up the family and moved to England. While this book is rightfully focused on Legge, further study of his two wives and children – and their perceptions of his career – would be fascinating.

James Legge and the Chinese Classics is tremendously detailed, carefully situating Legge and his legacy within wide-ranging historical events in China, England, Hong Kong, and Scotland. While it is currently considered questionable to write about Chinese history without the use of Chinese-language texts, Legge's work and Bowman's meticulous gathering of as

many English-language sources as possible are special strengths of the volume. This is an excellent study of a Scottish intellectual legacy in East Asia and the United Kingdom that is far removed from the activities of opium traders like William Jardine and James Matheson, or other missionaries who were less concerned than Legge about respect for Chinese culture, and who left behind tainted imperialist legacies. In the Epilogue, Bowman delivers an incisive evaluation of why Legge's work has since fallen to such undeserved obscurity; this section, in particular, makes an excellent reading for students of history. Finally, it is important to note how timely this book is. The texts that Legge lavished such attention on, and which the Communist Party publicly excoriated for decades, are increasingly being employed by Xi Jinping in his "anti-corruption" campaigns. As Bowman makes vividly clear, those who seek to understand China would be well-advised to consult Legge's nineteenth century legacy. This book serves as an outstanding entrée into his life and work.

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