Legge’s Christian Expectation and DE sacralization of Confucius in CC1 Version of Zhongyong

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ABSTRACT

The University of applied technology has the dual attributes of vocational education and higher education. In the establishment of the teaching system, the general quality education and the professional practical ability are both taken into consideration. With the acceleration of the 2025 process of manufacturing in China, the demand and requirement for new application technology talents are continuously improved. The paper studies the construction of enterprise integrated teaching system by analyzing the shortcomings of the traditional teaching mode of engineering education, and the perspective of cultivating technical talents of engineering application. Through collaborative innovation and cooperation with enterprise, an enterprise integrated teaching system should be established to highlight the teaching characteristics of application technology college.

KEYWORDS

University of applied technology, enterprise integrated, teaching system.

INTRODUCTION

Growing up in the fervent evangelical spirit of the times, James Legge aspired to become “the most ‘Christ-like’ of heroes-missionaries” [1]. After two years of theological studies in Highbury College and some Chinese language training in University College, London, Legge set off to the East in 1839 as a China missionary commissioned by the London Missionary Society. He arrived in Malacca in 1840, acted as a teacher, and then principal, of the Anglo-Chinese College founded by Robert Morrison, the first Protestant missionary to China. But it is the products of his scholarly pursuit as an amateur Sinologist -the annotated translations of Confucian classics entitled The Chinese Classics -that entitle him to lasting fame.

Legge’s CC1 version of Zhongyong appeared in volume one of The Chinese Classics in 1861, which includes translations of three of the Four Books. Unlike many missionaries who hastened to the work of translation with only a minimum command of the native language, Legge had spent twenty-one years on the Confucian classics by then. Though Legge has not turned translation into an altar for directly preaching the gospel, his CC1 version of Zhongyong nonetheless reveals an aggressive missionary agenda.
Legge used to regard the “term question” as “the most important controversy in the world”, but in 1880 he remembered it as “a long-standing nightmare.” [2] In spite of his extraordinary confidence in his own position in the controversy, he was never able to claim victory in the missionary debate over the purely missionary question – whether shangdi is God. The term question also divided the Catholic missionaries in the heat of the Chinese Rites Controversy, and the result is that in 1704 Pope Clement XI issued an edict banning the use of tian and shangdi as designations for God, replacing them with tianzhu or “Heavenly Lord”.

Legge’s Monotheistic Interpretation of tian in Zhongyong

Zhongyong commences with a line which tempts theistic reading:

What Heaven has conferred is called THE NATURE; An accordance with this nature is called THE PATH of duty; the regulation of this path is called INSTRUCTION. [3]

Two problems arise here. First, “Heaven” is often used metonymically for the God of the Bible in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Second, even if “Heaven” is the only choice for translation, Legge could have discouraged such misleading theological associations by adding an explanatory note on the concept of tian and its evolution in the Chinese philosophy. This is not to demand a translation to be exhaustive of the original. The problem with Legge here is that he goes against his usual practice of following Chinese interpretation in the translation, and of adopting one in translation and registering major dissents in the notes.

The crux here is the term tian. Legge’s translation of tian as “Heaven” appears reasonable and even admirable in that he does not render it directly as “God”. But “Heaven” is by no means equivalent to tian. It is in view of this that Eoyang (173) points out the paradox of translation here, “‘Heaven’ is the right translation for tian, but it invokes the wrong theology and posits the wrong cosmology”. What concerns Eoyang is that tian, the metaphysical origin of Confucian morality, runs the risk of being over-interpreted as God the Anglophone readers are prepared for a familiar theistic cosmology rather than the unfamiliar naturalistic cosmology which Zhongyong offers.

A brief review of the gloss on tian by three major Confucian commentators, whom Legge consults most frequently, serves to show how he has deviated from the common Chinese understanding of tian.

Kong Yingda, Zhu Xi and Mao Qiling (1623-1713) represent different commentarial traditions in China. Mao is particularly famous for his vehement opposition to Zhu’s orthodoxy, but none of them bothers to define what tian exactly is. Actually, they concur in presenting a cosmogony which is unmistakably materialistic or naturalistic, which holds no place for a divine creator as evoked by Legge’s “Heaven” or “God”. Strangely, in Legge’s long and meticulous note, he mentions none of these understandings on tian, and creates the illusion for his readers that to the Chinese tian means unproblematically the monotheistic Heaven or God. Personally, he may be genuinely convinced of the equivalence between tian and God, but as a translator he is certainly guilty of blocking access to the Chinese conception of tian and advancing his “private interpretation”, which is misleading.
To make it worse, Legge believes that *tian*, when not referring to the material sky, is used by the Chinese for God. And his paraphrase of the opening line of *Zhongyong* bears clear witness to his essentialist reading of *tian* as God:

To man belongs a moral nature, conferred on him by Heaven or God, by which he is constituted a law to himself. But as he is prone to deviate from the path in which, according to his nature, he should go, wise and good men—sages—have appeared, to explain and regulate this, helping all by their instructions to walk in it. [3]

No wonder Legge thinks the book “begins sufficiently well” [3]. A Christianized reading of its opening lines does seem to make sense, and *Zhongyong*’s anchoring of human morality in a transcendent Heaven seems in perfect agreement with Legge’s belief in a Chinese knowledge of God. Furthermore, Legge probably feels the temptation to use the idea of Heaven as a bridge to convert the Chinese. If they believe in an innate moral nature which comes from Heaven or God, all that the missionary needs to do is to stimulate within them a curiosity for fuller knowledge of God, and encourage them to know and worship Him. By translating *tian* as “Heaven” and interpreting it as God in the very beginning of *Zhongyong*, Legge has encouraged a Christian expectation for the text which the text never provides.

**Legge’s Monotheistic Interpretation of Shangdi in Zhongyong**

*Shangdi* only shows one time in *Zhongyong*, and Legge’s translation of *Shangdi* as God sends out an unmistakable message that the Chinese worship God:

By the ceremonies of the sacrifices to Heaven and Earth they served God [3]

“What is said about the sacrifices to God is important, in reference to the views which we should form about the ancient religion of China.” [3] To Legge, establishing “the ancient religion of China” as monotheistic, worshipping one God, is of paramount significance to Christian missions, as a Chinese concept of God can be used for advancing the whole “truth” of Christianity. The Chinese commentaries he cites, however, hardly support a monotheistic reading.

As a major participant in the prolonged missionary controversy over the “term question”, he is fully aware of the questionable nature of translating *Shangdi* as God. The term question also divided the Catholic missionaries in the heat of the Chinese Rites Controversy, and the result is that in 1704 Pope Clement XI issued an edict banning the use of *tian* and *Shangdi* as designations for God, replacing them with *tianzhu* or “Heavenly Lord” [5].

Given Legge’s eagerness to construct and defend monotheism in China, however, it is hardly surprising that he should seize upon and make so much of Confucius’s rare remarks on *Shangdi*. Although in his writings on Confucianism Legge generally avoids discussion of *Zhongyong*, particularly its metaphysics and cosmic vision, he does quote this line in his controversial translation—“In the ceremonies of the sacrifices to heaven and earth, they served God”—in a number of places. The importance of this line to Legge is that no less an authority than Confucius has intervened to avert the danger of “serious misconception concerning the oldest religious ideas and worship of the nation”, and to give “express testimony” that the sacrifices to “Heaven and Earth” has always been to one Being—Heaven or God. Unable to adduce much hard evidence from other resources, Legge determines that “the judgment of Confucius must be accepted as final on the common object of the two solstitial services.” [4]
LEGGE’S CRITIQUE OF SAGELY PERFECTION

Legge’s Wrestling between Human Perfection in Zhongyong and Human Sinfulness in Christian

_Zhongyong_ is important in Confucianism because it provides a metaphysical basis for the Confucian belief in moral cultivation. It maintains that some men-sages-are morally perfect and impeccable. Through their exemplary action, teachings, and the rituals and music they established, they help common people to cultivate moral character and strive towards ideal humanity. According to _Zhongyong_, all humans are endowed with a nature, and following this nature in all our actions will bring harmony to the human world and eventually to the whole universe. But it is not easy to be exactly and always true to our nature, without going beyond or falling short. The Neo-Confucian explanation for this is that we are apt to be led away from this moral nature in our daily transactions with the outside world. To not deviate from our nature, the way lies in constant moral cultivation and regulation. Sages, with the Confucian ideal humanity, embody the way and are naturally true to their nature (zhicheng), while common people need to make great moral and intellectual exertion in learning to be true to their nature (chengzhi).

The concept of human perfection, however, is incompatible with the Christian doctrine of human sinfulness, and as such it comes under Legge’s strict Christian scrutiny.

In his prolegomena of _Zhongyong_, Legge makes the following observations:

In these passages (chapter 20.18, 20.19) Confucius unhesitatingly enunciates his belief that there are some men who are absolutely perfect, who come into the world as we may conceive the first man was, when he was created by God “in His own image,” full of knowledge and righteousness, and who grow up as we know that Christ did, increasing in wisdom and in stature.” He disclaimed being considered to be such an (sic) one himself, but the sages of China were such. And moreover, others who are not so naturally may make themselves to become so…[3]

Legge points out that “these sentiments are contrary to the views of human nature which are presented in the Bible” [3], and concludes:

Neither the scriptures of God nor the experience of man know of individuals absolutely perfect. The other sentiment that men can make themselves perfect is equally wide of the truth. [3]

It would not be hard to see how Legge reasons with Zisi in biblical language after stretching our imagination a bit: Yes, what you say about human nature is acceptable, because when God created Adam “in His own image”, He must have endowed him with exceptionally qualities of knowledge and righteousness – what you call the “Heaven-endowed nature”. Yes, Adam must have been perfect for a time, just as “our Lord Jesus” always is, but this does not mean there was ever a perfect mortal. Adam sinned and through him we have all sinned before God. Perfection belongs properly to God and God only.

_Cheng_ figures prominently in part four of _Zhongyong_. At the very beginning of this part, Legge warns his readers against three problematic Confucian dogmas:

In this portion of the Work, there are specially the three following dogmas, which are more than questionable: -lst, that there are some men-Sages-naturally in a state of moral perfection; 2d (sic), That the same moral perfection is attainable by others, in
whom its development is impeded by their material organization, and the influence of external things; and 3d (sic), That the understanding of what is good will certainly lead to such moral perfection [3].

To Legge, these views are “more than questionable” because they threaten the very rationale for Christian missions: if humans can give full realization to their nature and become perfect through their own efforts, or by following the lead of naturally perfect sages, what need is there for divine salvation? Why then would missionaries need to come to China?

Not surprisingly, this part of Zhongyong is punctuated with Legge’s critical remarks and righteous assertions.

Legge’s DE sacralization of Confucius – China’s Perfect Sage

Apart from the Bible, Legge also resorts to common experience to back his argument. To a modern mind, he is probably right: “the experience of man”, indeed, knows of no “individuals absolutely perfect.” [3] The Chinese had always upheld Confucius as the perfect sage, but as Legge correctly points out, “he disclaimed being considered to be such an (sic) one himself” [3]. Much of Legge’s prolegomena to his translation of the Lunyu, which appears in the same volume (CC1) before Zhongyong, is devoted to pulling Confucius down from the shrine and reducing him to the historical personality that he actually was. After carefully enumerating the “deficiencies” of the sage, Legge declares that he is “unable to regard him (Confucius) as a great man” [3], much less a perfect man.

Legge’s desacralization of Confucius – China’s perfect sage and “teacher of ten thousand generations”, is a typical Christian response to human “usurpation” of God’s glory. His missionary duty to desacralize Confucius is bound to run into conflict with Zhongyong, which presents one of the earliest and most eloquent glorification of Confucius and the sagely way. Sages are important in Zhongyong because they represent ideal humanity, embody the human way, and point towards human transcendence in anthrop cosmic unity. By taking sagely perfection literally to task, Legge seeks to undermine the very foundation of Confucian teachings.

CONCLUSION

Missionary sinology, with its origin rooted in the age of Western imperialism and a not-so-innocent history, has every reason to be reconsidered its disciplinary heritage, objectives and premises. Legge’s Confucian translations, particularly his Chinese Classics as examples of Zhongyong, could be regarded as colonialist translation in the sense that they were made to desacralize Confucianism and facilitate Christian colonization of the “heathen” Chinese mind.

For details of Legge’s early life and education in Scotland and England, and his missionary and scholarly career in Malacca and Hong Kong, see Pfister (2004) and Wong Man-Kong (1996, 1997).

All the bold fonts in the citations are set by the author of this thesis to highlight the key words and expressions for his arguments.

It is interesting to note that in 1877 Legge was criticized by Nelson, an American missionary, for his “failure to condemn Confucianism for its humanistic presumption of perfectibility”, which, according to Nelson, is “Legge’s greatest affront to accepted Christian truth”. (Girardot, 2002: 231) Obviously Nelson has not bothered to read
Legge’s CC1 carefully. Nelson’s charge shows that to critique Confucianism actually constitutes a missionary duty.

REFERENCES