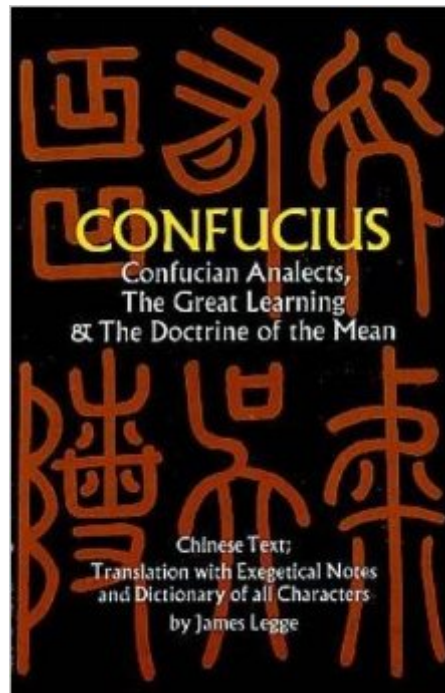


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Confucian Analects, The Great Learning & The Doctrine Of The Mean



Synopsis

Central to the study of Chinese civilization at its widest extension is the thought of the great sage K'ung, usually known in the West by the Latinized form of his name, Confucius. His works form the core of more than two thousand years of Oriental civilization, and even today, when he has been officially discarded, his thought remains important for understanding the present as well as the past. Yet Confucius is the property of not only the Orientalists: his ideas stood behind much of the rational social thought of the European Enlightenment, as great philosophers from Leibnitz on seized with delight "the perfect ethic without supernaturalism: that China offered them. The present edition of the wisdom of Confucius is certainly the best edition ever prepared in the West. The results of many years of study in China by the great Sinologist James Legge, it contains the entire Chinese text of the Analects (or sayings) of Confucius in large, readable characters, and beneath this Legge's full translation, which has been accepted as the definitive, standard English version. The book also includes The Great Learning and The Doctrine of the Mean. In addition to the texts and translation, a wealth of helpful material is offered to the reader: countless notes embodying textual studies, commentators' opinions, interpretation of individual characters, disputed meanings, and similar material. More than 125 pages of introduction cover the Chinese classics, the history of the texts in this volume, and the life and influence of Confucius. Most useful, too, is a complete dictionary of all the Chinese characters in the book, with meanings, grammatical comments, place locations, and similar data. Subject and name indexes enable you to find material easily.

Book Information

Paperback: 528 pages

Publisher: Dover Publications; Republication edition (June 1, 1971)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0486227464

ISBN-13: 978-0486227467

Product Dimensions: 5.4 x 1.1 x 8.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (16 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #897,352 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #137 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality > Other Eastern Religions & Sacred Texts > Confucianism](#) #1806 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > History & Surveys](#) #6649 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Eastern](#)

Customer Reviews

There are lots of good reasons to condemn Legge's translations of the Chinese classics to the graveyard of moribund scholarship. He's barely readable - yes, it's true. Legge was no giant of the written word when he did these translations to begin with, and the passage of time has made the phrasing seem so archaic that you wonder if he was trying to sound unintelligible even when he wrote it. Legge also uses a transliteration system that is so eccentric as to be indecipherable if you are trying to trace out the actual sounds of the Chinese words. The reason for this seems to be that the pronunciation of Chinese has changed sufficiently to make his transliteration obsolete. But Legge has one advantage that no other translator had, or ever can have again. He did his translations when the Confucian scholarly tradition was still alive in China, and as a result he could consult with scholars within this tradition to determine the meaning of the phrases as they were understood in the traditional context. It's a little like having an erudite clergyman explain the meaning of a phrase in the Bible rather than an archeologist - while both explanations are valid in their own way, the clergyman's explanation will indicate a living belief rather than a dissection. And that is Legge's great value. Most Chinese language scholars will give him a nod, even today. For the beginner, he's not a good place to start, admittedly. But he has his virtues.

The other reviews on this page are quite insightful; I have a few more comments: 1. Modern readers tend not to be enamored of Legge's prose, but it has its own coherence and merit. What is most remarkable, however, is the accuracy of his translations, in view of their date. You may not agree with his views and interpretations; you may not like his phraseology; but he simply does not make mistakes. His translations are supported by copious (if dense) footnotes that explain the rationale behind his translating decisions. (To be sure, these notes are intended for highly informed readers.) You can never say that Legge is wrong; you can say that you prefer to read the text a different way. 2. A point that no one seems to have made: one advantage of this edition is that it is one of the few available in the West with the complete Chinese text. In sum: this is a reasonably priced paperback that includes the original Chinese text and the first great Western translation of the Analects. If you are serious about Confucius, you cannot ignore this book.

I have read the entire book for a doctoral research project. There simply is no other Author that even comes close to offering such excellent commentary on the Confucian classics. He references many of the ancient and more recent Chinese commentators in his footnotes. Very comprehensive. He gives you both the Chinese original and then the English translation with the commentary translated

into English. If you want to better understand the Chinese and where they come from, Legge's translations of the Chinese classics is a must. Ray

This collection of these three texts of Confucius translated by James Legge were my first introduction to the writings and philosophy of Confucius. When I was in the bookstore, I decided to pick this book out of the others because like Evans-Wentz's original translations of Tibetan Buddhist text, I prefer to pick the book with the most information and research put in to it. I also trusted James Legge because he went to China and studied with Confucius scholars. I have not read any other translation of Confucius so I must judge this translation on its own. Since it was translated around 1893, you can tell in the language. Yes, it can be pretty dry at times but after looking up a lot of words in the dictionary and getting more deep into Confucius' thought, I thought I understood the text well. You should read a few pages though before you buy this book because I am sure a lot of people would hate it. Which leads me to the next cautionary, this book is VERY scholarly and dense. I could barely even follow the notes at the bottom of the text. They mostly have to do with the treatment of the translation of Chinese characters. Also unless you have an extensive background of Chinese history and the Confucian tradition, the introduction are hard to follow because they expect you know the background information already. Another thing, which isn't James Legge's fault, I would love to see is some information discussing the cultural revolution's reaction to the Confucian tradition and how it is slowly coming back. I would warn everyone to check out this book in a library or bookstore before buying it to see how it meets their needs. I found it very useful, even though a lot of it was over my head.

Classic translation of a classic text, this edition is a bit dated but still a very valuable source. The volume deserves a place on the shelf of anyone studying world religions, history of religion, ethical theory, political theory or comparative religion or philosophy. It is a monument to Confucius' wisdom and the tradition of his teaching. It is still edifying, perennially interesting and essential to an understanding of Chinese, Korean or Japanese civilization; beyond that it gives deep insight into the universal Tao, as C. S. Lewis called the common elements of the moral understanding of all truly civilized people.

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