

Translating Chinese Classics in a Colonial Context: James Legge and His Two Versions of the Zhongyong, by Hui Wang, Peter Lang, 2008, 228 pp, hb. \$82.95, ISBN-13: 978-3-03911-631-7.

Paul Boshears, Europäische Universität für Interdisziplinäre Studien / The European Graduate School, paul.boshears@egs.edu

Hui Wang presents James Legge's two translations of the Confucian classic, *Zhongyong* 中庸, as "a call for post-colonial reflections [that will] lead to keener awareness of the ideological implications and consequences of the seemingly innocent act of translation" (144). Wang is interested in developing a postcolonial reading of Legge's translation so that contemporary readers will be aware of the "danger[s] of the cultural approach [Legge] represented" (183). Wang sets out to identify patterns in Legge's interpretive choices to detect if there is an agenda behind these. This is a book written primarily, it seems, for translators. Wang claims to implement a broader conception of translation than perhaps others in the Translation Studies field might be comfortable with by including both the translations Legge created as well as his critical apparatuses.

While Legge's two translations are suggested to play significant roles in the book, the author of this review found the explication of the two translations uninformative in the end. The book does not present the two translations by Legge in their entirety, but instead focuses on three core concepts in Legge's translations the *Zhongyong*: *tian* 天, *shangdi* 上帝, and *cheng* 誠. These are appropriate terms to focus on when considering what's at stake in the two translations Legge created. Those scholars interested in understanding Legge's "discovery" of monotheism in China will take note. Translators not familiar with the philosophical stakes present in rendering the above terms will benefit from this book as an introductory text to the field. However, philosophers familiar with the translations of Confucian classics into English in the last fifteen years will be poorly served by the half-articulated positions presented in the book.

The title of the book suggests that the process of colonialization will be considered in relation to James Legge's two translations of the *Zhongyong*, Wang doesn't seem to be clear on what this process looks like: who are the actors, what are the strategies a colonial power will have to deploy in order to be successful in their campaign of domination, and ultimately, what are the vehicles through which power relations are manifest? If colonialization occurs, it first and foremost occurs as a power relation. To be sure,

what is intended by postcolonial is a thorny question today. Wang pushes toward a postcolonial reading of Legge's translations of the *Zhongyong*, and notes that Marxist, humanist, nativist, culturalist, and poststructuralist approaches to decolonization have been attempted. But why not a Confucian approach? What would a Confucian approach to decolonization even look like? It's not as though the Chinese have not exerted a colonial influence in the world (we look to the histories of the Korean peninsula, the Ryukyus, and Southeast Asia). If there is a Confucian text that could provide insights or suggest potential tools for decolonization, surely the *Zhongyong* is the repository. The overall Confucian project will emphasize the practice of reciprocity in one's relationships to the human community, but the *Zhongyong* is singular in its cosmological insistence. The *Zhongyong* is unique in its presentation of the human as mutual collaborator with the processes through which the universe itself is manifest.

Wang misses an opportunity to "de-colonize" the *Zhongyong*, and perhaps the English-speaking world, by explicating how core concepts such as *tian* 天 or *cheng* 誠 could be translated and how these translated terms could impact the receiving (English-speaking) culture. In other words, translations are not one-way transmissions; they can and frequently do cause ruptures in the languages to which the foreign texts are introduced. This insight is what makes for successful translations, ultimately, because their work is more than a felicitous rendering of a term or the tiresome question of the truth of a translated term. Successful translations not only transport information between different languages, they also transform the two languages encountered and the speakers of those languages. Wang argues for a shift from delivering the truth of translated material to the ethical relations between the translator, the text, and the audience. (We must imagine Wang intends that the audience includes both the recipient of the foreign language into their native tongue as well as the speakers of that originating language.) Wang is to be admired for calling on future translators and those working in translation to "reform colonialist ideology in a postcolonial era [as well as] reconsider what is ethical in a multicultural context" (196). Surely the teachings of Confucius himself afford many generative and robust tools for doing precisely this.