



# Confucius, The Great Teacher; A Study

*George Gardiner Alexander*

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In the following pages I have endeavoured to bring together, in the compass of a single volume, and in the form which would be most likely to interest the general reader, a resume of all that concerns the life, times, and teaching of the great Chinese philosopher, Confucius. I have occasionally included in the details of his life incidents which are legendary, rather than historical, for the reason that, had I discarded them, I should have deprived the reader of many striking illustrations of his character, and of the manners, and of the mode of thought, belonging to the time in which he lived; and in doing this I have only followed the example of many preceding writers, amongst whom are to be enumerated such high authorities as M. Pauthier and the Jesuit Father P. Amiot.

In the various extracts from Chinese sources I have sometimes found it necessary to alter the terms in which they had been translated, in order to incorporate within them the explanations given in notes, and the better to bring them into harmony with the object of this work, as well as to make them more capable of being understood when produced as isolated passages; but I have for this reason, more frequently preferred an adaptation from some purely literal translation, whilst in not a few instances I have gone at once to the original Chinese text. My great object in every case, in addition to that which has been already stated, having been to place the subject before the reader in language which, whilst preserving a correct idea of the meaning of the original, would be most appropriate to the period of the composition, and to the circumstances under which it was written.

I am supported in my idea of the necessity of substituting a free rendering, approaching in many cases to a paraphrase, for a close literal translation of the ancient literature of China, by no less an authority than that of the Professor of Chinese in the University of Oxford, Dr. Legge, whose translations of the sacred books, written for scholars rather than for the general public, have put him at the head of our English translators. Dr. Legge says, in the preface to his translation of the “Yih-King,” published in 1882, “The written characters of the Chinese are not representations of words, but symbols of ideas, and the combination of them in composition is not a representation of what the author would say, but of what he thinks. It is in vain, therefore, for a translator to attempt a literal version. When the symbolic characters have brought his mind *en rapport* with that of the author, he is free to render the ideas in his own or any other speech, in the best manner he can attain to.”

The inception of the work dates from the time— now more than forty years ago—when the Confucian writings became part of my course of study when endeavouring to gain a knowledge of the Chinese language and literature during a period of service in China. In old age one reverts *a ses premiers amours*, and hence this book is submitted to the indulgent suffrage of the public, in the sincere hope that it may be of some little use in extending amongst us a knowledge of the people of another great empire, the confines of which have now become contiguous to our own.

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