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ROBERT MORRISON

THE SCHOLAR AND THE MAN

by

LINDSAY RIDE

VICE-CHANCELLOR, UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

and

ILLUSTRATED CATALOGUE

of the Exhibition

*held at the University of Hong Kong
September fourth to eighteenth 1957
to commemorate the 150th Anniversary
of Robert Morrison's arrival in China*



HONG KONG UNIVERSITY PRESS
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ROBERT MORRISON

1782—1834

賴廉士著

馬禮遜其學其人

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INTRODUCTION

THE arrival of Robert Morrison in China one hundred and fifty years ago is a landmark in the cultural contacts between China and the West, for not only did Morrison bring to China a knowledge of the Christian foundation of our Western Civilization, but by establishing an Anglo-Chinese College he introduced to the peoples of the Orient our natural sciences and our humanities. At the same time, he compiled for the two peoples, the first Chinese-English Dictionary, and for the English speaking world he produced a Chinese Grammar.

The University's Commemoration of the 4th September 1807 will be inaugurated by HIS EXCELLENCY, SIR ALEXANDER GRANTHAM, G.C.M.G., M.A., LL.D., The Chancellor, at the Fung Ping Shan Library when he opens an Exhibition of books, manuscripts and pictures relating to Morrison and his work. The preview of this Exhibition will be followed by a lecture on Morrison given by the Vice-Chancellor in the Loke Yew Hall of the University. The Exhibition will be open to the public from the 5th to the 18th of September.

This publication contains a descriptive catalogue of the exhibits, a short biography of Morrison under the title *Robert Morrison, the Scholar and the Man*, followed by the *Illustrated Catalogue of the Exhibition*.

22nd August, 1957

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II

ILLUSTRATED CATALOGUE

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ROBERT MORRISON

THE SCHOLAR AND THE MAN

THE University of Hong Kong celebrates to-day, along with many people in learned and other societies the world over, and especially with the London Missionary Society, the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the arrival here in China of a most remarkable man. ROBERT MORRISON was first and foremost a missionary but he was endowed with marked talent in other fields as well, and it was due to his pre-eminence in the many fields that he adorned, that his name became indelibly associated with the history of places far removed from his confined spheres of action in Canton and Macao.

The University celebrates this sesquicentenary with thankfulness because it was Morrison who set the pattern that has been followed by all British institutions of higher learning in this part of the world ever since. We celebrate it with humility, because he was the greatest European scholar of Chinese in his day. We celebrate it with pride because it is his trail we haltingly tread, the trail he blazed to make possible sinology as we know it to-day. We particularly celebrate it on this 4th of September, because it was on that day in 1807 that he landed at Macao and that is the date to which he constantly referred in his letters as marking the beginning of his work in China.

I. FORMATIVE YEARS

Birth and Boyhood. ROBERT MORRISON was possessed of most remarkable qualities and these were evident even in his early boyhood and manhood which were spent in northern England. He was born at Buller's Green, Morpeth in Northumberland, the youngest son in a family of eight children, which some ardent nationalists in these days would describe I suppose as the result of a mixed marriage, for his father was Scottish and his mother English.

James Morrison, his father, was born in Dunfermline and, when still a young man, he moved to Northumberland, earning his living at first on the land, later becoming a maker of lasts and boot-trees, in which trade he developed quite a good business. On moving south he retained his active association with the Scottish church, and hence young Robert was subjected from his earliest infancy to a rigorous religious discipline. His maternal uncle, one James Nicholson, was a schoolmaster and it was through his

interest in his nephew that the seeds of learning were so well planted in Robert's receptive brain, seeds which are still producing a plentiful harvest over a century later in far off China.

At a very early age Robert Morrison was apprenticed to his father and at his trade he made most commendable progress; at the age of sixteen he became a member of the Presbyterian Church and from then on his activities followed very much the evangelical pattern so similar in character to that of the Primitive Methodist Connexion which was simultaneously spreading farther to the south amongst the peasant folk of the Midlands. Fear of eternal damnation, and consciousness of the guilt of sin and of self unworthiness, drove him to spend much of his leisure time in prayer, in meditation and in study of the Bible and religious works; but even with all this he neglected neither his manual profession nor his general studies. Not being satisfied with proficiency at subjects such as arithmetic, astronomy and botany, he later took special tuition in Latin, Greek and Hebrew to equip himself the better to understand the Scriptures.

Preparation for the Ministry. By the age of twenty, he had decided to join the ministry of the church, and in November 1802 he applied 'to be received as a student at Hoxton Academy, one of the most valuable of those "Institutions, formed by Evangelical Dissenters"', for the purpose of affording an extended education to candidates for the holy ministry'.¹

Needless to say his application was successful and he made the journey from Newcastle to London by ship; he arrived at the Academy on Friday, 7th January 1803, and immediately entered upon his courses of study. One of his fellow students—Rev. J. Clunie, LL.D.—writing many years later said: 'His character was even then distinguished by those qualities which subsequently rendered him so illustrious—the most ardent piety—indefatigable diligence—and devoted zeal'.²

Before he had left home to join the Academy, he had expressed a liking for mission work, but the idea was most unpopular with his father, his family and his friends. During his studies his desire to become a missionary increased, and in 1804 he addressed a letter to the Rev. Alexander Waugh, Chairman of the Committee of Examination, offering his services to the Directors of the London Missionary Society. His offer was accepted and in May 1804 he joined Mr Bogue's academy at Gosport for special training for the mission field.

If ever the quotation 'The child is father of the man' were true of anyone, it was true of Robert Morrison, for already at this time could be seen emerging the scholar and the man; in fact the more he applied his talents and his time to becoming a missionary, the more did the scholar and the man emerge.

I must leave it to others to assess his stature amongst the ranks of the world's great missionaries, but I am sure even a brief study of his life, such as the following, will establish in your minds as it has in mine, his inalienable right, both as a scholar and as a counsellor, to a niche in the hall of fame.

How much the success of his mission was due to the policy of the London Missionary Society or how much the Society fell in with the developing potentialities of Morrison, it is hard to say. Certainly the capabilities of Morrison and the plans of the Society were as complementary as a hand and glove; and when the Directors decided to send a mission to China, its objects being not to teach and preach but to acquire the language and to translate the Bible into Chinese, Morrison was obviously the man to send, and for China he was ear-marked. In point of fact the Society originally decided to send a team of three or four persons, but for one reason or another the other volunteers were not forthcoming; even Morrison himself tried to persuade his friend Clunie to accompany him but he too had to say no. Looking back one cannot help saying 'How providential'; at the time everyone must have said 'How disappointing'. To Morrison it made only this difference that he worked harder, he prayed harder and he studied harder than ever. His constant prayer was to be made a good man and a good missionary; his constant fear was that he was not studying enough or learning enough. The range of his studies may be measured by one of his statements in his diary at the time that in the past week he had not done enough geography, history, medicine, natural philosophy, languages, mathematics or sermonizing.³

In August 1805 he left Gosport for London where he studied medicine with a Dr Blair at St Bartholomew's, astronomy with Dr Hutton at Greenwich, and Chinese with a young tutor named Yong Sam-tak. At both writing and reading Chinese he made such rapid progress that he was soon able to begin transcribing Chinese manuscripts in the British Museum and such had been his diligence and such the economic use of his time that when he finally left England for China he had already mastered the translation of a book of extracts of the New Testament written by Roman Catholic missionaries and had become well acquainted with those Chinese dictionaries that were available. All this he accomplished in about eighteen months and in addition 'he found opportunity for frequent preaching, and for numerous efforts of Christian mercy'.⁴

Some idea of the lofty standard he set for himself may be measured by the fact that his progress at Chinese disappointed him so much that in October he arranged for his tutor to live with him. However successful this may have been as far as learning Cantonese was concerned, his occasional references to this in his diary show that it was not one hundred per cent successful socially, due to Yong's 'proud and domineering temper', and his much greater

diligence in reading the books of Confucius compared with Morrison's study of the Bible.⁵

In July 1806 he was invited by a minister in Newcastle to preach there on behalf of a Society for the Sick and Friendless Poor. This gave him an opportunity of visiting Edinburgh and Glasgow as well as saying goodbye to his family and boyhood friends. After returning south his time was fully occupied with his Chinese studies and making preparation for his voyage. Plans for the latter were changed from time to time because of the prejudice in England against missionaries going to India and the Far East, and in the end he had to go to Canton by way of America. The East India Company would not take missionaries in their ships nor give them permission to reside in their territories, so it was necessary to travel by an indirect route in a foreign ship and even then there was no certainty of his being allowed to stay in China when he arrive there.

Departure for China. Such was Morrison's tenacity of purpose and such his belief that it was God's will he should go, that these difficulties meant nothing to him at all. On 8th January 1807 he was ordained in Scots Church, Swallow Street, London, on the 26th took leave by letters of his aged father and the Directors of the London Missionary Society; and on the 28th he proceeded to Gravesend to await the arrival of the ship *Remittance* which was to take him to New York. He embarked on Saturday 31st January at noon, sailed at four in the afternoon, but anchored at the Nore at 8 p.m. The ship, along with many others, was detained in the Downs by bad weather and on the 17th February a violent gale played such havoc with the fleet there assembled that many ships were driven ashore, some were sunk, and the *Remittance* was the only one able to continue her voyage, finally leaving home waters on the 26th February. But that was not the end of their misfortunes—after a reasonably quick run to the Banks of Newfoundland, it took a further six weeks to reach New York where they arrived on 20th April, tired and dispirited after a trip of 109 days. Early in April they rescued 11 people from a dismasted and sinking brig, 15 days out of New York bound for Amsterdam. Morrison was violently sick for much of the journey yet he still found time to help the shipwrecked sufferers, as well as to preach regularly to the members of the ship's crew.

Immediately on arrival in New York Morrison began to make enquiries concerning his onward passage to China, and, with commendable foresight, he arranged to secure a measure of help from the American Consul at Canton in case his own countrymen failed him on arrival. Morrison the missionary felt very much alone in the world, but Morrison the man was undaunted by mere difficulties such as these.

He visited Philadelphia where he made valuable friendships amongst various missionary bodies and succeeded in getting a letter of introduction from Mr Maddison, the Secretary of State in Washington, to Mr Carrington, the American Consul at Canton, as well as some other valuable introductions to people in New York. Armed with these letters on his return to that city he quickly obtained the promise of a passage in the *Trident* (Capt. Blakeman) due to sail on the 10th May, in return for the freight payment for his luggage only. The actual date of sailing was 12th May. Many of the large circle of friends he had so quickly made in America, came to the docks to bid him farewell; not a few were overcome by the sadness and solemnity of the occasion, but Morrison was not only composed and dignified but self-possessed enough to deal with a scoffer as if he were in a revival meeting in his own home town. As Morrison completed the business side of his embarkation, a clerk, turning from his desk, said: 'And so, Mr Morrison, you really expect that you will make an impression on the idolatry of the great Chinese empire?' 'No, Sir,' said Morrison, with more than his usual sternness, 'I expect God will'.⁶

His trip to China was very different from that to New York; the route followed was across the Atlantic, round the Cape of Good Hope, via Malaya to Macao. In spite of his having acquired his sea-legs during the long voyage across the North Atlantic, he was again distressingly sea-sick at the start of this second stage of the voyage; but after a week or so he was much better and thenceforth spent much of his time studying Chinese, Hebrew, and Greek, and in preaching to the crew. His description of the time-honoured ceremonies associated with crossing the line provide a very human touch in his letters home, as do his remarks concerning the naked Malays 'deceived by the priests of Mohammed'.⁷

2. CHINA

Arrival at Macao. ON THE 113th day out from New York; on Friday 4th September, the *Trident* anchored in Macao Roads and Morrison went ashore that evening and met Mr Chalmers and Sir George T. Staunton. The former on being given a letter of introduction from Mr Cowie, one of the London Missionary Society directors, was not very encouraging; he pointed out to Morrison that the Chinese were prohibited under the penalty of death from teaching their language to foreigners. Sir George Staunton was hardly less comforting, pointing out that it was against the regulations of the East India Company to allow any Britishers, except their own employees and traders, to stay in Canton, while residence in Macao would be almost

impossible for Morrison owing to the jealousy and power of the Roman Catholic bishop and priests. On the other hand when he presented his letter of introduction to Mr Carrington, the American Consul and Chief of the American Factory, he was at once offered temporary accommodation at the American Consulate in Canton. This offer he accepted on his arrival at Canton but later he moved to the apartment of Messrs Bull and Milnor—two American friends who lived in the Old French Factory. There he lived happily as an American firstly because he did not dare to be known as a Britisher and secondly because it was cheaper. 'It would be impossible for me to dwell amidst the princely grandeur of the English who reside here',⁸ wrote Morrison in a letter to the Treasurer of the Society back in London! After settling down in Canton he wrote a very diplomatic letter to Sir George Staunton who was still in Macao informing him where he was staying in Canton and indicating that he proposed to take no active steps towards engaging a tutor till he could have the benefit of Sir George's advice. When Sir George came up to Canton, he introduced Morrison to Mr Roberts, the Chief of the English Factory, who most surprisingly straightaway procured for him as a teacher a young Roman Catholic Chinese from Peking.

This surprising and contradictory train of events shows how amiable a man Morrison must have been and how he must have had the happy knack of being able to deal with people in a normal, natural manner. British officialdom was, to say the least, not favourably disposed towards him or his project; the relationship between the British and the Americans was anything but cordial; yet he was able to overcome British antagonism and convert it into sympathy and at the same time to enlist active American help.

Conditions in Canton. It is interesting to see how accurately Morrison sized up the situation in his first few weeks of residence in China and to note how he planned ahead for all possible happenings. In the event of the Chinese forbidding him to stay in Canton and in the double event of the Portuguese refusing him permission to stay in Macao, he planned to go to Malacca. He advised London at once against sending out any more straight missionaries to Canton; a medical missionary he advised, would get a ready passage and be well received, one trained in astronomy would be welcome to regulate time-keepers both on ships and ashore and another trained in watch-making for repairs; these he shrewdly advised would stand the best chance of remaining in Canton unobserved by the Chinese and accepted by foreign officialdom. At the same time, although impressed by the magnitude of the task of converting China and depressed by progress possible via Canton, he threw out the shrewd suggestion that the Society should consider the possibility of working into China from the west, via Russia.

The things that worried him most in these early days were the non-observance, even by Europeans, of the Sabbath; the cunning, jealousy, idolatry and inquisitiveness of the Chinese; the inordinate amount he was costing the mission; and above all his loneliness, relieved only by his study of the Bible and his engrossment in his task of learning Chinese.

His Sundays he spent in solitude, praying, singing hymns and psalms as though in Church at home, in philosophizing and soliloquizing on idolatry among the heathen and in bemoaning his own shortcomings. Although he rested completely from his ordinary weekday labours, Sunday was never one of complete rest or relaxation; for on Sunday he frequently wrote to his father, his sister or his brothers, or to people in England or America whom he felt were interested in his work. In his early days he was frequently the victim of squeeze and he records the occasions quite frankly in his letters, in one case naively saying: 'What can I do? I could be angry with him, but that would not mend the matter. I am obliged to bear it'.⁹

Speculation as to what he was really doing in Canton was rife amongst the Chinese especially as he was not obviously engaged in a profit-making business; the suspicion this excited and the subterfuges it caused him to adopt worried him not a little, and only his steadfastness and tenacity of purpose enabled him to carry on at all. The report of the Society for the year 1809 records: 'The spirit of perseverance, fortitude, diligence, and fervent piety manifested by this missionary, affords great satisfaction to the Directors, and we trust, is a happy presage of the accomplishment of that great work to which he is devoted'.¹⁰

One other characteristic which is so very obvious from his letters and journals is his sense of deep appreciation of the help he received from many quarters, and his recognition of this is given much greater prominence than the jealousy and opposition which hemmed him in on all sides. In a letter to one of his brothers written about six months after his arrival, he mentions that the 'Jesuits and other Romish clergy have been in China betwixt three and four hundred years' and records their politeness and civility, and acknowledges their valuable help in his work.¹¹ His American friends, and also Sir George Staunton, come in for commendation in this 'blessing counting' exercise and when in this frame of mind he invariably ends with what was to him a matter of deep consolation and that was the abiding presence of his God and His constant nearness and support. Again and again he worries over the fact that he is doing no active missionary work, and again and again he goes over in his mind the arguments of both sides: 'What if, attempting to teach, you be expelled, and lose an opportunity of doing greater good by the dissemination of the Scriptures?' he asks himself at one moment, and at another

he wonders whether he is being merely tempted to 'preach the Gospel, if but to one, and leave events with God'.¹²

By the end of 1807 Morrison was convinced that he should no longer go on imposing on the good nature of his American friends who were becoming afraid of political repercussions and rather embarrassed by his continual residence in American quarters. Not being able to get accommodation elsewhere he had to stay in the factory, but he became more independent by taking a couple of basement rooms that had been used as a godown or store. He was a hard taskmaster as far as he himself was concerned and he drove himself unmercifully; he adopted Cantonese dress, customs and food, had all his meals with his tutor and associated with Chinese only; he allowed his nails to go uncut, wore a false pigtail, thick Chinese shoes and a Chinese long gown, not because he was an eccentric faddist, but because he was convinced it would help him in his work. He soon found he was wrong and when his health began to fail under the strain, he had the intellectual honesty and moral courage to admit his judgment had been wrong and so he changed back to the European mode of living; but he continued to live most frugally; every self-denial, every self-imposed labour, the avoidance of all extravagance and the adoption of a simple life were not a form of discipline but were only undertaken if he felt certain they would facilitate the attainment of his dual objective, proficiency in the language and the translation of the Bible. He quickly came to realize that by courting difficulties and neglecting personal comforts his work did not prosper, and by indulging in the normal personal comforts of a normal life, neither did his work suffer. His habit and his habits all had to conform to the one purpose of his life and everything he did was first of all subjected to that rigid test. But he at length came to realize that if he lost his health completely all would be lost, so when he became so weak that he could not walk across his room he moved to better ventilated quarters in the French Factory.

Writing to Sir George Staunton shortly afterwards in February he said he would not go to Macao in the summer because it would excite notice whereas in Canton he could live quietly and had a fair chance of remaining unnoticed. This however was not to be, and in May Dr Pearson recommended that for health reasons he should remove to Macao, and his friends having obtained accommodation for him there, he left Canton on board the *Margaret* on 1st June in a most depressed state of mind and fearful lest the move to Macao might lead to his being forced to leave China altogether with his work hardly yet begun. One ray of hope however was the good news that Mr Roberts of the East India Company approved of his plan to write a dictionary and that the Company would perhaps help financially. Another was the fact that a Chinese of some influence interceded on his behalf as far as Canton was

concerned; so he gave up planning his flight to Prince of Wales' Island and returned to his work with a light heart, and was not a little bit ashamed of himself for having distrusted his God.

His state of health at this time must have been very poor indeed and on the trip to Macao, which tired him a great deal and was a great strain, he was very ill; on arrival he was given a house that was lying vacant for the simple reason people feared the roof might at any time fall in. This actually did happen to one of the rooms later on in June, but that month was also marked by another event of much more import to Morrison than falling roofs—namely the completion of the transcription of a Latin and Chinese dictionary of eleven hundred pages, and this achievement contributed greatly to a more tranquil frame of mind. Other factors played their part also; for example he found some of the Roman Catholic priests both friendly and helpful, and not antagonistic as he had feared and been led to expect; again when he became advanced enough in the colloquial to discuss the substance of the Gospels and the books he was translating with his Chinese friends and teachers, he began to feel that he was at last being given the opportunity of living up to his missionary responsibilities. His peace of mind so influenced his health that by the end of August he was fit enough to return to Canton, and he was specially pleased to find that he was able to get his books back through Whampoa without any difficulty; but then came a period of political unrest which badly upset his plans and his work once more. The trouble was caused by a most unfortunate decision taken in India, where not appreciating the relationship then existing between the Portuguese and the Chinese, and fearing that the French might attempt to seize Macao, the Governor-General of India, Lord Minto, dispatched a powerful fleet and armed forces to defend Macao. The troops landed on the 21st September 1808, thereby antagonizing both the Portuguese and the Chinese. After some weeks of futile occupation and much negotiating they withdrew in mid-December having achieved nothing but making more trouble for every one, and in the process making the British more unpopular than ever. English residents had to take refuge on board ships as the Chinese would neither work for them nor supply them with provisions; Morrison was afforded refuge on board the *Warley* by Capt. Montague, and Yong Sam-tak took care of his premises and removed all his books to safety. For ten days he remained on board at Whampoa and then went on to Macao where one of his Chinese tutors, at great risk to himself, came to live with him. It was some time before he was able to get his books down to Macao, but when he did he set to work again whole heartedly and with such excellent results that he began to think he preferred it to Canton.

At the end of 1808 he sent to the Society a report which they published in 1810; in it he acknowledged the considerable success which had rewarded his