

---

# *A Bicentenary in Robert Morrison's Scholarship on China And his Significance for Today*

---

T. H. BARRETT

## **Abstract**

*Robert Morrison (1782–1834), the first Protestant missionary to China, was responsible for the completion of the earliest Chinese-English Dictionary in 1814. Though this work would not have reached publication without the help of Chinese assistants, and of the printer P. P. Thoms (1790–1855), even so Morrison's scholarly achievements in this and other aspects of Chinese studies were prodigious. This survey of recent research makes clear the continuing value of his writings to contemporary scholars, and also suggests that he was not simply more seriously engaged in attempting to understand China than his contemporaries but also more enlightened than a good number of his successors in missionary work.*

The following remarks make no pretence of deriving from any profound or protracted research; no effort has been made to disguise their origins in an occasional lecture, delivered at SOAS on 30 May 2014.<sup>1</sup> Yet this piece may even so serve to underline changed attitudes in China to the contribution of missionary scholars to Chinese studies, and also indicate some new directions in research. A generation ago the eminent Chinese historian Bai Shouyi 白壽彝 (1909–2000) summed up the advent of the Protestant missions in a brief paragraph beginning “Taking advantage of their contacts with Chinese officials and ordinary people alike, the missionaries were able to gather information about China and help the colonialists in their aggression against China”.<sup>2</sup> To be frank, such remarks, in the case of some individual missionaries, have seen some justification in the light of recent scholarship.<sup>3</sup> Yet today, as the reprinting of missionary scholarship in China shows, a more generous appreciation of the achievements of other missionaries prevails – again, not without reason, as is argued below. Yet a balanced appraisal of the early Protestant missions lies perhaps as yet in the future. It would have been inappropriate to sound other than a celebratory note in a bicentennial context, though I hope that it is made clear that we may not assume a unity of views even within the same mission, let alone within the plethora of different Protestant groups of many

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to the Chinese Academy of Fine Arts for having suggested the lecture; to the London Confucius Institute for having organised it; and to the advice of a number of friends in its preparation, notably Charles Aylmer, Christopher Daily, Bernhard Führer and Andrew West; any errors and misconceptions are my own.

<sup>2</sup> Bai Shouyi, *An Outline History of China* (Beijing, 1982), p. 430.

<sup>3</sup> Note Jessie Gregory Lutz, *Opening China: Karl F. A. Gützlaff and Sino-Western Relations, 1827–1852* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2008), pp. 313–319, and also pp. 77–83 on this missionary and opium smuggling.

nations that sent their personnel forth to convert the Chinese.<sup>4</sup> To prolong this introduction in order to provide a more nuanced account would, in any case, outbalance the brief remarks below entirely. One hopes these words of warning will have sufficed to prepare the reader.

As many will know, it is the custom in the chapels of some Oxbridge colleges that a sermon is preached once a year in commemoration of benefactors. My remarks are not intended as a sermon, since the School of Oriental and African Studies is an entirely secular institution, but the practice of commemoration nevertheless seems a worthy one, and especially so in the case of Robert Morrison, since his material legacy, in the form of the Chinese library that he collected that has come down to SOAS through University College, is surely today of immense financial value as well as academic significance. This bicentenary of an important stage in Morrison's career is also, I believe, a good opportunity to take stock of the very diverse areas in which his legacy is of interest to academics today, and to draw together an account giving some notion of the range of recent publications that have touched on his various achievements, especially since some very recent research now provides a most interesting picture of the intellectual foundations of his career, which may be used to illuminate some hitherto under-appreciated aspects of his work.

Robert Morrison was not the first Briton to publish about China at first hand – that honour should probably go to the Scot John Bell (1691–1780), who reached Beijing in the entourage of a Russian mission in 1720 and eventually published his memoirs in 1763.<sup>5</sup> Also the first work of Chinese literature to be translated, directly (more or less) into English had appeared a couple of years earlier. It was the work of an employee of the East India Company and was started at about the same time that Bell was setting out for China.<sup>6</sup> For the most part, however, British information about China, up to the last decade of the eighteenth century, was derived from the writings of Catholic missionaries and their associates, which were originally published mainly in French.<sup>7</sup> The Macartney Mission to China of 1793–4 added greatly to the stock of British knowledge, but was hampered by the almost complete lack of linguistic competence in Chinese available among its regular members, and when the first Englishman to embark upon the study of Chinese – rather than acquiring it through contact with Chinese traders – looked for tuition in 1802, he was obliged to go to Paris. This gentleman, Thomas Manning (1772–1840), arrived in Canton almost nine months before Morrison, but his legacy for British students of China turned out to be far less conspicuous.<sup>8</sup>

Morrison's life, after all, was one widely celebrated by many in the century or so following his death – he was born at Buller's Green in Morpeth, Northumberland in 1782 and died in

<sup>4</sup>Something of the remarkable diversity of the Protestant missions – and also of their non-Protestant contemporaries – may now be discerned in the masterly work of R. G. Tiedemann, *Reference Guide to Christian Missionary Societies in China*, (Armonk, NY, 2009).

<sup>5</sup>For a succinct account of Bell, see Jonathan Spence, *The Chan's Great Continent: China in Western Minds* (Harmondsworth, 1998), pp. 44–51.

<sup>6</sup>This was the novel *The Fortunate Union*, presented to an English readership by Thomas Percy, on whom the latest account is by Peter J. Kitson, *Forging Romantic China: Sino-British Cultural Exchange, 1760–1840* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 26–44. The full story of this translation is somewhat complex.

<sup>7</sup>For a finely judged essay on Britain and China in the eighteenth century and the impact of the Macartney mission, see Peter Marshall. "Britain and China in the Late Eighteenth Century", in Robert A. Bickers, ed., *Ritual and Diplomacy: The Macartney Mission to China 1792–1794* (London, 1993), pp. 11–29.

<sup>8</sup>On Manning there is as yet only one monograph, namely Mary Bellhouse, *My Friend M*, published by the author from her home in Thatcham, Berkshire, in 2006, though Peter Kitson (see note 2, above) does cover Manning to some extent in his work. I hope to clarify some aspects of Manning's legacy in due course.

Canton in 1834. Among the many accounts written of his life, we should particularly note those written for children, such as *Robert Morrison: China's Pioneer* by Ernest H. Hayes – the copy I own is from the seventh edition, a Sunday School prize given to a Cambridge schoolboy in 1946.<sup>9</sup> Like one or two other missionary figures he also gets a whole chapter in a history of China for children written in 1936.<sup>10</sup> To grasp the extent that in former times education about China in Britain was dominated by missionary writings, in the absence of almost any study of China in our universities, let alone our schools, until the middle of the twentieth century, is undoubtedly important, but for present purposes it is the academic value of Morrison's work rather than its inspirational effect on the young that I wish to examine. In fact Morrison as an exemplary missionary was probably eclipsed in fame eventually by James Hudson Taylor (1832–1905) of the China Inland Mission, to say nothing of the immensely popular missionary heroes active in other parts of the globe, such as David Livingstone (1813–1873).

And Morrison's dictionary must form the starting point of any appreciation of his legacy, not simply because this year marks the bicentenary of the first phase of its compilation but because on his tombstone in Macao the production of this work precedes the mention of his translation of the Bible. No one could call it a perfect work, but it remains very widely admired.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, for more than a generation it held the field, so that when it was reprinted in part in 1865 in Shanghai and London, the new printing opens with the declaration that “the work itself is of such rare excellence, as to be amply sufficient to meet the prevailing want of the times”.<sup>12</sup> The verdict of my teacher, Denis Twitchett (1928–2006), that it remained unsurpassed till the end of the century has been widely noted, for example by David B. Honey, who cites also the point, made upon its first publication, that all earlier works, which were in Latin or French, whether printed or in manuscript, did not include Chinese characters in the examples.<sup>13</sup> John Lust, too, in cataloguing the copy in the SOAS library, makes a good point in observing that Morrison strove to create a dictionary not simply of elevated classical style, but also one that embraced the colloquial, even the vulgar.<sup>14</sup> One notes that an interest in everyday expressions was something he shared – apparently unbeknownst

<sup>9</sup>The first edition was Ernest H. Hayes, *Robert Morrison: China's Pioneer*, (Wallington, Surrey, The Religious Education Press, 1925).

<sup>10</sup>Millicent and Margaret Thomas, *The Years Behind the Wall* (London, The Livingstone Press, 1936) pp. 63–72.

<sup>11</sup>For one introductory survey in English, see Xian Wu and Liren Zheng, “Robert Morrison and the First Chinese-English Dictionary” *Journal of East Asian Libraries* 147 (February 2009), pp. 1–12.

<sup>12</sup>This is the view of the ‘Advertisement’ in Rev. R. Morrison, *A Dictionary of the Chinese Language* (Shanghai, London Mission Press, and London, Trübner, 1865), p. i. The reprint is of the second part, which first appeared at Macao in 1819.

<sup>13</sup>David B. Honey, *Incense at the Altar: Pioneering Sinologists and the Development of Classical Chinese Philology* (New Haven, American Oriental Society, 2001), pp. 175–176, but note that on the former page, n. 30, he also cites a criticism of a point concerning the phonology of the dictionary. The point made in the Advertisement cited by Honey appears also in Morrison's introduction to his work, *A Dictionary of the Chinese Language*, I, Part 1 (Macao, East India Company, 1815), p. x. For the insertion of characters in Dictionary of Chinese by Basilio Brollo de Glemona, (1648–1703), see Honey, *Incense at the Altar*, p. 25, and note Morrison's remarks on this work on pp. xi–xvi of the same introduction. The French movable Chinese types had been created out of wood at great expense over twenty years from 1720 onwards, but were far too big to be employed other than as head words: see Cécile Leung, *Etienne Fourmont (1683–1745): Oriental and Chinese Languages in Eighteenth-century France* (Leuven, 2002), pp. 241–246. For a thorough survey of printing in Chinese in Europe see Georg Lehner, *Der Druck chinesischer Zeichen in Europa* (Wiesbaden, 2004), of which pp. 37–41 cover Morrison.

<sup>14</sup>John Lust, *Western Books on China Published up to 1850* (London, 1987), pp. 247–248.

to him – with his more learned senior Chinese contemporaries, but rather doubts that they would have thought of including their observations in a regular dictionary.<sup>15</sup> Admittedly the result of Morrison's unprecedented policy of including different linguistic registers in one work is that his masterpiece is a rather voluminous – not so say unwieldy – work, but one feels that nevertheless the diligent researcher using it can be rewarded with some rare glimpses of the living language of South China in the early nineteenth century, so I am very glad to see that it takes pride of place in occupying the first six of the fourteen volumes of the *Selected Works of Robert Morrison* reprinted in China in 2008, the final volume of which, incidentally, is an indispensable bibliography of Morrison studies listing 235 Chinese items, 40 Japanese and 592 in English.<sup>16</sup>

But the vast repository of linguistic information contained in these six volumes is important also for non-linguistic reasons, in that it also represents a triumph in printing technology and design. Christoph Harbsmeier, for example, speaks of the dictionary as “remarkable not only for its high quality, but also the exquisite printing”.<sup>17</sup> The printing of Chinese characters mixed in with other scripts was not new, since it had been a feature of Chinese publishing since at least Mongol times, if not much earlier, if we include the use of Sanskrit in talismanic Chinese Buddhist texts.<sup>18</sup> The use of movable type in China, including metal movable type, is also very old, though the creation of matrices for producing new supplies of type that forms part of the system attributed to Gutenberg in Europe was not used in China in Morrison's time and was not used in the production of his *magnum opus*.<sup>19</sup> But the large-scale integration of Chinese and Roman movable type in metal required by his dictionary was something new, and it is very much to the credit of Peter Perring Thoms, the British printer Morrison employed with funding from the East India Company to publish his dictionary, that this innovation was introduced so successfully.<sup>20</sup> It is no wonder therefore that the first major study into Morrison's work to be carried out in London in recent years was a 1996 doctorate on missionary printing.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup>I have in mind Qian Daxin 錢大昕 (1728–1804) and Chen Zhan 陳鱣 (1753–1817), whose notes on the histories of everyday expressions, *Hengyan lu* 恆言錄 and *Hengyan guanglu* 恆言廣錄 respectively, were eventually published together with an index (Shanghai, Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1958), the latter for the first time and the former on the basis of a first edition of 1805, which is not at any rate included in Morrison's Chinese library.

<sup>16</sup>Zhang Xiping 張西平, Anthony Ferguson, and Wu Zhiliang 吳志良, (eds), *馬禮遜文集 Malixun wenji*, (Zhengzhou, Daxiang 大象 chubanshe, 2008). The other volumes reprint his grammar of Chinese, his wife's memoir of his life, and the retrospect on his mission by his colleague William Milne (1785–1822), the latter two items with Chinese translations.

<sup>17</sup>See n. 46 on p. 338 of Christoph Harbsmeier, “John Webb and the Early History of the Study of the Classical Chinese Language in the West”, in Ming Wilson and John Cayley, (eds), *Europe Studies China* (London, Han-shan Tang Books, 1995), pp. 297–338.

<sup>18</sup>There are plenty of examples of these in Dunhuang collections and elsewhere: see Denis Twitchett, *Printing and Publishing in Medieval China* (London, 1983), p. 19, for one well-known example. It must be said that in such early block prints the integration of Chinese and non-Chinese scripts is not close.

<sup>19</sup>This feature of pre-modern Chinese printing is mentioned in most surveys; for a monograph on the topic, see Xu Yinong 徐憶農, *Huozi ben* 活字本, (Nanjing, Jiangsu Renmin chubanshe, 2002).

<sup>20</sup>Thoms arrived in Canton in September 1814 and after returning to England published on Chinese topics until 1851. He is the subject of ongoing research by Patricia Sieber of Ohio State University.

<sup>21</sup>This is the study available in Chinese as Su Jing 蘇精, *Malixun yu Zhongwen yinshua chuban* 馬禮遜與中文印要出版, (Taipei, Taiwan xueshang shuju, 2000). The author's doctoral thesis was completed as Ching Su, “The Printing Presses of the London Missionary Society Among the Chinese”, at University College, London, and it is this version that Western scholars tend to cite.

But not all of Morrison's linguistic knowledge was incorporated in his dictionary. We should also remember that he wrote too on the topic of the grammar of Chinese, and indeed stimulated through his efforts considerable discussion in this new field in both Asia and Europe.<sup>22</sup> Not least of his achievements in this area was to arrange the printing in Malacca of earlier Jesuit scholarship on this topic that had long been unavailable outside Paris.<sup>23</sup> Unsurprisingly, therefore, visiting scholars who have been attracted to SOAS by its Morrison legacy have published also on the question of Morrison's researches in relation to the evolving Western understanding of the grammar of Chinese.<sup>24</sup> In fact, as one of the handful of fluent foreign speakers of Chinese on the South China Coast at this time, almost everything he wrote is of value today, especially in view of the very interesting period of history that he lived through. The early nineteenth century was for long rather neglected by historians of China, falling as it does between the great glory days of the Manchu empire in the eighteenth century and the onset of modern China that is conventionally dated to the First Opium War of 1840, though looking at the period again without seeing it as a mere coda to something else and also – which is much more difficult – without introducing the element of hindsight that makes the arrival of Western imperialism the *only* topic of interest does raise the possibility of rethinking the course of history in quite interesting ways.<sup>25</sup> Considered simply as historical evidence for the times and places that he observed Morrison's writings often confirm information difficult to find in Chinese sources, for example on the orthographic practices of secret society adherents, otherwise only known from examples preserved in Southeast Asian epigraphic materials.<sup>26</sup>

Of course we should bear in mind that Morrison had no intention whatsoever of playing the role of historian. He was from beginning to end a missionary, and since he was the first representative of his particular branch of Christianity to reach China, he saw it as his primary responsibility to bring the Christian message to China by translating the Christian scriptures into Chinese. It does not seem to have been generally noticed that his predecessors in the Catholic church had in fact translated and published one book from their Bible into Chinese in Beijing in 1730, but since this was the Book of Tobit from the Apocrypha, Robert Morrison would not have considered it part of the Bible as he understood it, even if he knew about it.<sup>27</sup> As is well known, however, he did – as he acknowledged – make use of an unpublished Catholic partial rendering of the scriptures for some of his initial work of translation, though we should note that this source, Sloane manuscript 3599 in the British Library, was based on the Latin of the Vulgate, whereas I suspect that Morrison certainly would have felt obliged to consult the original Greek and Hebrew as appropriate, even when

<sup>22</sup>See on this Harbsmeier, "John Webb", pp. 331–332.

<sup>23</sup>On this story, see the useful summary in Knud Lundbæk, *Joseph de Prémare (1666–1736), SJ: Chinese Philology and Figurism* (Aarhus, 1991), pp. 178–179.

<sup>24</sup>Naitō Masako 内藤正子 "R. モリソンとJ. マーシユマンの中國文法書", *Nihon Chūgoku gakkaï hō* 日本中國學會報 47 (1995), pp. 210–222.

<sup>25</sup>I particularly have in mind here the intriguing work of Philip A. Kuhn, first published as *Les origines de l'État chinois moderne*, (Paris, 1999).

<sup>26</sup>I have drawn attention to this in my review of Barend J. ter Haar, *Ritual and Mythology of the Chinese Triads: Creating an Identity* (Leiden, 1998), in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 11.2 (2001), pp. 313–314; cf. the remarks in ter Haar's excellent monograph, pp. 345–346.

<sup>27</sup>See Nicholas Standaert, *Handbook of Christianity in China, Volume One, 635–1800* (Leiden, 2001), p. 622. Copies of this publication exist in Paris and in the Vatican.

he had an existing translation in front of him. The transcription of this manuscript used by Morrison himself survives yet in Hong Kong University Library and has even been put online by the Bible Society of Taiwan, unfortunately not in a form that is particularly easy to consult, but one published description does not at least falsify this assumption, in that it shows that in his preliminary annotation he identifies passages reflecting the Vulgate.<sup>28</sup> In fact we do not even have the successive versions of Morrison's scriptural translations here in London, apart from an 1844 printing of his 1819 version of the Book of Exodus. They may, however, be consulted in the holdings of the Bible Society, whose collection is contained in the University Library, Cambridge.<sup>29</sup> But his first complete Bible of 1823, republished in facsimile in Singapore in 2007 to commemorate the bicentenary of his arrival in China at the price of US \$ 1,500, has been made available free on the internet as a useful PDF by an individual concerned to spare this cost to others.<sup>30</sup>

The extraordinary linguistic resources for the study of translation into Chinese – to say nothing of the study of printing technology – that are held by the Bible Society remain as yet virtually untouched, and I have only consulted Morrison's Bible translations in the most cursory fashion. It would seem even on this basis both that his successive versions do show modification, but that the 1823 result still reflects the wording of the Sloane manuscript, at least for the one or two passages I was able to compare on a brief visit to the British Museum last year. I hope to be able to revise my remarks on this topic later this summer for publication, but for the time being I can report that at least in places even the 1823 Morrison Bible plainly reflects the great difficulties that missionaries faced, not simply with the Chinese language but also with grasping the complexities of Chinese religious culture. At least so one must conclude from its rendering of the Book of Acts, Chapter 17, verse 22, where in Morrison's English Bible Saint Paul informs his Athenian audience that he considers that "in all things ye are too superstitious" – somehow saying in Chinese that he thinks that they "revere bodhisattvas too much" 虔崇菩薩太過 does not to my way of thinking quite capture what the apostle had in mind; at least I believe such news would certainly not have made much sense in first century Athens. I know of only one recent work that uses successive Chinese Bible translations for research purposes, but even though its scope is quite restricted, it is not surprising to find that this passage as rendered by Morrison and by his contemporaries and successors is one of the introductory examples used.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup>This Bible Society has also uploaded various other versions: see <http://www.biblesociety-tw.org> (consulted 21 May 2014); all these works may be consulted after a fashion in the websites Rare Bible section, 珍本聖經. Morrison's manuscript, which bears the title *Manuscript Chinese*, is described in Lindsay Ride, *Robert Morrison, The Scholar and the Man* (Hong Kong, 1957), pp. 45–46. In the remarks of Samuel Kidd – a figure introduced below as having had the same education as Morrison – appended to the memoir by his widow, the forty-three pages devoted to a discussion of Morrison's Bible translation adduce both Hebrew and Greek: see Eliza A. Morrison, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of Robert Morrison, D.D.* (London, 1839), second appendix, pp. 332–374.

<sup>29</sup>Hubert W. Spillett, *A Catalogue of Scriptures in the Languages of China and the Republic of China* (London, 1975), pp. 1–7, lists these translations in chronological order; cf. pp. xi–xii for Morrison's earlier source.

<sup>30</sup>See [www.streetpreaching.com/morrison.morrison\\_chinese\\_bible\\_1823.htm](http://www.streetpreaching.com/morrison.morrison_chinese_bible_1823.htm), consulted on 21 May 2014. The individual responsible is a Baptist missionary to the Philippines named Gerald Sutek. The bibliography mentioned above, at n. 16, reveals that there was also an earlier Japanese reprinting.

<sup>31</sup>Toshikazu S. Foley, *Biblical Translation in Chinese and Greek: Verbal Aspect in Theory and Practice* (Leiden, 2009), pp. 42–44; see pp. 22–33 for some account of the various Chinese Bibles. Though this study is ahead of its time in many ways, this researcher does not appear to have worked with the Bible Society catalogue by Hubert Spillett,

We do however know enough about Morrison to be quite sure that he was more than conscious of his own limitations. A recent study of the shorter translations and compositions of the Protestant missionaries brings this out very well. This is of course another area in which Morrison made pioneering contributions.<sup>32</sup> But in supporting a request for funding from the Religious Tract Society of London for his assistant Liang Fa 梁發 (1789–1855) he stated plainly that Liang's tracts were "executed in a manner that no European now living, with whom I am acquainted, could equal".<sup>33</sup> The wording is interesting – does he mean that he recognised that some of his Catholic predecessors had achieved a creditable command even of written Chinese style, or does he have an eye to the future, when a better founded education in Chinese than he had been able to acquire might produce Protestant missionaries capable of writing Chinese with greater confidence than he did?

The latter possibility is suggested by the extraordinary steps he took to support research and teaching in Chinese through the creation and transfer to Britain of the first Chinese library in this country – of course Chinese books had been arriving here through trade and other contacts for two centuries before him, but he was the first person deliberately to try to furnish Britain with the bibliographic means to understand China. For the history of Morrison's Chinese library I can do no better than recommend the narrative provided by Andrew West in his introduction to the catalogue that he compiled and that SOAS published in 1998.<sup>34</sup> I should however point out that Andrew West has subsequently, while pursuing an entirely different career, continued to expand his researches into the collection and most generously to share his knowledge on Morrison – and indeed on a number of other unrelated but very worthwhile topics – by means of his website.<sup>35</sup> Among the many other valuable contributions available there he has provided a transcription of Morrison's own 1824 catalogue of his library, SOAS MS 80823. It is wonderful to be able to read his comments on his books, such as "Colloquial, small print, vulgar book" on *Rouputuan* 肉蒲團, *The Prayer Mat of Flesh*, as it is known in English, or "Unintelligible mysticism" on the *Lotus Sutra*; occasionally he also gives the price he paid, too.

The assiduity with which Morrison built up this collection of about ten thousand volumes covering up to nine hundred titles or so between his arrival in 1807 and his departure for England in 1823 is quite staggering. It contains few conventionally valuable books, but – like his dictionary and its account of otherwise unrecorded aspects of the Chinese language – affords access to parts of the book trade often obscure to those whose libraries have inherited the labours of the traditional East Asian book collector. What I mean is that it does not

and the popular usage of the term bodhisattva has, it seems, not quite been grasped – Chinese religious culture remains an area somewhat obscure to many outsiders.

<sup>32</sup>These are listed in John T. P. Lai, *Negotiating Religious Gaps: The Enterprise of Translating Christian Tracts by Protestant Missionaries in Nineteenth-Century China* (Sankt Augustin, 2012), pp. 249–250; note also the discussion of specific examples of his work on pp. 110 (the first Protestant hymnal, versified by his assistants) and 129–130 (the first translation, a catechism). What appears to be his earliest tract, however, from 1811, is to be found catalogued as Sinica 2672 in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

<sup>33</sup>Lai, *Negotiating Religious Gaps*, p. 102. Su Jing has researched a number of Morrison's Chinese helpers in his *Zhongguo, kai men! Malisun ji xiangguan renwu yanjiu* 中國開門! 馬禮遜及相關人物研究 (Hong Kong, 2005), especially pp. 203–261, but does not have a separate chapter on Liang Fa.

<sup>34</sup>Andrew C. West, *Catalogue of the Morrison Collection of Chinese Books* (London, 1998), pp. vii–xv.

<sup>35</sup>The range of his scholarship may be found by visiting this site, [www.babelstone.co.uk](http://www.babelstone.co.uk), which is always rewarding, especially for those with philological interests.

simply give a testimony to what was on general sale in Canton during a specific and narrow period of time – which I have on occasion found a very valuable point to be able to establish, especially when considering the changes that overtook the Chinese language immediately afterwards due to external influences.<sup>36</sup> It also contains many ephemeral items like popular tracts that most traditional collectors would have ignored, and that even when they have been preserved often betray little information as to the time and place when they were in circulation. Unfortunately so far no scholar seems to have taken advantage of the opportunity thus afforded. But after all both Oxford and Cambridge refused to accept his books at all when he offered them to these universities on his arrival with them in England – and they then had to wait about six decades before any comparable collections became available to them in the form of the libraries of Alexander Wylie (1815–1887) and Sir Thomas Wade (1818–1895).<sup>37</sup> Even University College only accepted them after the funds to pay for them, and for a retired missionary to serve as a Professor, were raised by public subscription in order to keep Morrison's widow and this fellow missionary, Samuel Kidd (1804–1843), from penury.<sup>38</sup> The suggestion during Morrison's lifetime by one enlightened individual that Morrison could have made an excellent Professor himself had of course fallen on entirely deaf ears.<sup>39</sup> At least Kidd was able to use the books before his early death to publish a general introduction to Chinese culture – or at least I think he claims this, but his style of writing is so cumbersome and diffuse I am not quite sure, though he clearly says that he took the portrait of the Daoguang 道光 Emperor that adorns this volume's frontispiece from a Chinese drawing in the possession of Morrison's widow.<sup>40</sup>

We have now in our survey reached the end of this man's life, even if the foregoing account of his works has of necessity been somewhat cursory. I have left out for example his pioneering work on Chinese dialect studies and on the creation of educational foundations, though other scholars have good remarks on these matters.<sup>41</sup> On his involvement in the early Royal Asiatic Society there is probably more to be said, but not here.<sup>42</sup> So, finally, how did his non-missionary contemporaries remember this extraordinarily self-disciplined, deeply devout and indefatigably energetic man? He was remembered for his humanity. Sir

<sup>36</sup>See for example p. 313 at n. 29 of Tim H. Barrett and Francesca Tarocco, "Terminology and Religious Identity: Buddhism and the Genealogy of the Term *Zongjiao*", in Volkhard Krech and Marion Steinecke, eds., *Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe* (Leiden and Boston, 2012), pp. 307–319.

<sup>37</sup>The circumstances surrounding the latter gift are illuminated in Charles Aylmer, "Sir Thomas Wade and the Centenary of Chinese Studies at Cambridge", *Hanxue yanjiu* 漢學研究 7.2 (1989), pp. 405–422; I do not know about Oxford.

<sup>38</sup>Kidd was a Gosport trainee – the significance of which will become clearer below – who headed for a while the college founded by Morrison in Malacca, though I am not sure that he was a close friend, since it is not clear how much time they spent in each other's company: see Brian Harrison, *Waiting for China: The Anglo-Chinese College at Malacca, 1818–1843, and Early Nineteenth-Century Missions* (Hong Kong, 1979), pp. 79–84, 190.

<sup>39</sup>Lundbæk, *Prémare*, p. 183, quoting an anonymous comment reported by Robert Thom (1807–1846).

<sup>40</sup>Samuel Kidd, *China, or, Illustrations of the Symbols, Philosophy, Antiquities, Customs, Superstitions, Laws, Government, Education, and Literature of the Chinese* (London, 1841), pp. vii, viii.

<sup>41</sup>On Morrison and the study of Cantonese there is a useful preface by Kingsley Bolton to the reprint of his 1828 vocabulary: see especially Bolton, *A vocabulary of the Canton dialect* (London, 2001), pp. xxvi–xxxv; on p. xxxi it is suggested that this work "established a precedent for missionary studies of Chinese dialects". For Morrison and the Anglo-Chinese College at Malacca, there is much of value in Brian Harrison, *Waiting for China*, though for the role of Bogue as providing the template for this institution it is also necessary to consult Christopher Daily's work, introduced below.

<sup>42</sup>He was elected a Fellow in 1825 – just about the only form of recognition he received for his Chinese studies.



John Francis Davis (1798–1890), as he was eventually to become, the second governor of Hong Kong, served as a fellow-employee of the East India Company with Morrison in his youth, and frequently cites him as an authority in his own writings on China. But one story he tells himself, rather than citing Morrison, concerns the missionary scholar's intervention on behalf of an old and friendless Chinese man condemned to death who still protested his innocence. Morrison took up his case, arguing in Chinese so effectively before the mandarin that the prisoner was spared.<sup>43</sup>

But is it possible to get closer than even a sympathetic observer like Sir John and know more about Morrison the man, about what he felt and about what values motivated him? Last year saw the appearance of a remarkable new study, based not like most of its predecessors on his widow's selection of his words but directly on the manuscripts by Morrison himself that we hold in SOAS, drawing on his correspondence with the London Missionary Society, under whose auspices he went out to China. This reveals a man often intensely lonely. But it also reveals a man faithful to a fully worked out plan that was not his own. Christopher Daily has gone beyond the SOAS archive to reconstruct the training that Morrison received at a long-forgotten missionary college in Gosport, and has uncovered the role in his life of an inspirational Scottish teacher, David Bogue (1750–1825). In order to understand the great good fortune of Morrison in receiving his training from Bogue, however, it is necessary to say a few words about the alternative conceptions of preparation for mission current at the end of the eighteenth century, especially since these ideas re-emerged to some extent not too long after Morrison's death.

One of the co-founders of the British missionary movement along with Bogue was a Cornishman named Thomas Haweis (1734–1820), a clergyman of the established Church of England, but separately linked to the remarkable Selina, Countess of Huntingdon (1707–1791) and her reforming Evangelical group. In order to understand Haweis we should recall the nervous atmosphere in Britain in the late eighteenth century, when the eruption of the French Revolution was followed by open war once again with the old enemy France in a new and disturbing guise, causing the establishment to view religious reform with deep misgivings. It would be entirely wrong to suggest that the primary concern of Haweis was anything other than the extension of the Kingdom of God, and it is more than likely that this desire on his part preceded the outbreak of Revolution in France.<sup>44</sup> But he clearly felt under some obligation to demonstrate his patriotism, contacting the government of the day through an intermediary to offer his services in rallying his co-religionists to the national cause, and picking as his first target for mission an area, Tahiti, that he reckoned would be advantageous to British commerce and even colonisation – no doubt after fighting one global war with France in his lifetime, the thought of pre-empting these rivals was also somewhere in his mind.<sup>45</sup>

To staff his mission, however, he assumed that what he needed were not educated persons but 'godly mechanics': devout men and woman who could impress the local population with

<sup>43</sup>John Francis Davis, *The Chinese: A General Description of the Empire of China and Its Inhabitants* Vol. I (London, 1836), pp. 375–376.

<sup>44</sup>A. Skevington Wood, *Thomas Haweis, 1734–1820* (London, 1957), p. 170.

<sup>45</sup>Skevington Wood, *Haweis*, pp. 234–235, 239.

their mastery of practical knowledge. Intellectual engagement with the locals was not to be attempted: “Avoid all subtleties and deep points of controversy, both among yourselves and the natives. Never dispute. Waive, as much as possible, what would lead to questions, rather than godly edifying”.<sup>46</sup> The results of this policy, as Christopher Daily shows, were utterly disastrous: what Haweis imagined to be the practical skills of hat making, bricklaying, and so forth, had no use in the South Pacific, and the godly mechanics found what was probably for most of them their first attempt at learning another language, completely beyond their abilities. Stranded far from home and hearth, the majority deserted the mission, disheartened beyond endurance.<sup>47</sup>

Yet, to be honest, regrettably something of the same cultural blindness may also be encountered in the initial training methods of the later China Inland Mission. This mission was an international enterprise, embracing for example recruits from the Protestant lands of North Europe, and so lacked the imperialist undercurrent present in the Tahiti experiment. Again, I would not wish to impugn in any way the dedication and high principles of the adherents of this mission, who went forth in the clear knowledge not simply that they might be killed, but also that they might be visiting death on their own children. It was my privilege in my student days to know an elderly missionary who was the youngest survivor of those caught up in the events of 1900, but his two infant sisters had not been so lucky, perishing on the road as his parents fled southwards to safety. Even so, modern scholars have sometimes expressed amazement at the complete lack of cultural curiosity even of this mission’s best-educated recruits.<sup>48</sup> Something of the very narrow cultural horizons of the China Inland Mission may be gauged from the biography of the woman responsible for the selection of their female candidates, whose brief concerned identifying the truly devout rather than the culturally aware – the latter task, one fears, might have been beyond her, for the examples given of the cases where her powers of perception failed suggest charitably at the very least a somewhat limited familiarity with those not of her kind: “Among those who took advantage of her goodness were a Jewess and her daughter, who professed conversion and got a glorious holiday in Kent to escape persecution, and a Roman Catholic girl who came over from Ireland to evade the priests, and turned out to be a kleptomaniac!”<sup>49</sup>

David Bogue was very different. A product of the Scottish Enlightenment, he was deeply influenced by the philosophy of Thomas Reid (1710–1796), who argued for the essential commonsense of all humankind, but he did not underestimate the problems involved in human communication. The recruits in his charge were expected to gain a good grounding in their own cultural traditions, especially the languages of Scripture, so as to be able to engage with other cultures with some intellectual confidence. In effect, as Christopher Daily’s work shows by recounting Morrison’s career in the light of his education by Bogue at

<sup>46</sup>Skevington Wood, *Haweis*, p. 206.

<sup>47</sup>Christopher A. Daily, *Robert Morrison and the Protestant Plan for China* (Hong Kong, 2013), pp. 25–32.

<sup>48</sup>Thus Alwyn Austin, *China’s Millions: The China Inland Mission and Late Qing Society, 1832–1905* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2007), pp. 222–223, initially quoting Pat Barr. Austin does even so point out that eventually the CIM set up a rather good language school in China itself.

<sup>49</sup>Mildred Cable and Francesca French, *A Woman Who Laughed: Henrietta Soltau Who Laughed at Impossibilities and Cried ‘It Shall Be Done’* (London, 1934), p. 216.

his academy at Gosport, his teacher provided a template to which he adhered with singular determination. I can do no better than quote his summary:

“The spine of Bogue’s mission model had missionaries mastering the relevant languages, translating the Bible, composing a dictionary and grammar, and establishing a local version of the academy for converts. If time allowed, the missionaries were to continue producing texts by translating other helpful theological manuscripts – a list of which Bogue provided. Near the conclusion of Bogue’s template, with the founding of the school, the missionary was to pass the programme on to a trustworthy convert, who, in turn, would establish a nearby sister station and reproduce the Gosport outline”.<sup>50</sup>

As his book makes clear, incidentally, printing skills were another element that Bogue taught his charges, whilst Bogue’s own library served as a model for their own educational efforts. The relationship of the English-language Morrison Library in Hong Kong to what we know of the Gosport holdings is precisely the topic of Dr. Daily’s current research. But if we look at the overall intention of the Gosport system, we can see that there is no room here for imperialism or even the promotion of trade. True, when hard pressed by inadequate support from London, Robert Morrison took up employment with the East India Company, and later served his country as an interpreter, at a point when the shameful clash between Britain and China over opium lay as yet in the future.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps a religious leader should be a patriot, and Samuel Kidd does in fact use the word in his posthumous appreciation of Morrison, but in such a way as to suggest that he was at any rate not a patriot after the same fashion as Haweis.<sup>52</sup> Even later, when Britain became involved in a military conflict with China, Kidd, also a Gosport product, naturally suggested that the British government should rightfully expend some money on trying to understand the nation it was attacking. But he follows this plea with this remark: “Still, I confess, I would much rather that the liberality, the learning, and the benevolent aid, of the British people, were called forth for the avowed purpose of encouraging the study of an important branch of general philology, and of oriental philosophy, than for the mere object of subserving the growth of political power and commercial influence”.<sup>53</sup>

To this I can only say Amen. Government, I feel, has in the past not done well in educating Britain about China, largely because it is not educated itself.<sup>54</sup> As for commerce, it will only provide enough education to be commercially adequate at a commercially viable level. Plainly the richness of Chinese requires more than that, and China merits more than that. Now that the higher education system here has been put on a market footing, the experience of the East India Company which before Morrison, as noted already, produced

<sup>50</sup>Daily, *Protestant Plan*, p. 196.

<sup>51</sup>In this final role Morrison, despite his relatively humble origins, was able through his religious convictions especially to win the respect and friendship of his aristocratic commander, Lord William John Napier (1786–1834): see (slightly inaccurately) Priscilla Napier, *Barbarian Eye: Lord Napier in China, 1834, the Prelude to Hong Kong* (London, 1995), p. 139, based on Napier’s papers – Ms. Napier is, however, not the only one to assume that Morrison was a Scot.

<sup>52</sup>See his ‘Critical Notice’ (which, as noted above, forms an appendix to Eliza Morrison, *Memoirs*), p. 86: “Whatever he accomplished as an ardent scholar, a zealous divine, and a steady patriot, owed its origins to his religious character”.

<sup>53</sup>Kidd, *China*, p. 402.

<sup>54</sup>T. H. Barrett, *The Three Things I Learned About China* (London, 2013), pp. 1–3.

only one literary, Chinese-English translation in over a century and a half of trading, gives us, one fears, some indication of the powerlessness of money alone. Yes, we still have much to learn here from Robert Morrison. [tb2@soas.ac.uk](mailto:tb2@soas.ac.uk)

T. H. BARRETT

*School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*