

SOAS Special Collections Guides:

Sources available at SOAS Library on Robert Morrison – First Protestant Missionary to China

This guide offers a brief overview of the sources held at SOAS Library relating to the life and work of Robert Morrison (1782-1834) – the first protestant missionary to China.

Born in 1782, Robert Morrison offered his services to the London Missionary Society in 1807 and was the pioneer Protestant missionary to China. He arrived at Guangzhou [Canton] on 7th September 1807. At the end of 1808 he became Translator to the East India Company's Factory at Canton, and secured a legal basis for residence in Canton under the auspices of the Company.

In 1813 he completed the translation into Chinese of the New Testament, the printing of which was finished early in 1814. In 1817, on the completion of his Anglo-Chinese Dictionary, the Senate of the University of Glasgow conferred on him the degree of Doctor of Divinity. In 1818 the Anglo-Chinese College at Malacca was established by his



efforts. On 25th November 1819, the version of the entire Scriptures in Chinese, made by himself and Dr. Milne, was completed.

Morrison baptized the first Protestant Chinese Christian, in Tsae-Ar-Ko, 1814, and in 1825 he ordained the first Chinese pastor, Leang A-fa. Dr. Robert Morrison died at Canton on 1st August 1834.

[Based on entry for Morrison in the 'London Missionary Society Register of Missionaries, Deputations, etc., 1796-1923']

There are a number of important sources relating to the life and work of Robert Morrison at SOAS Library. The following is a summary of these sources, with corresponding references.

Archive of the London Missionary Society (LMS)

Papers of Robert Morrison relating to his service as a missionary for the London Missionary Society, 1807-1834, including his candidate's papers, engravings and portraits, incoming correspondence from Morrison to the LMS headquarters in London, and journals (diaries):

Robert Morrison's Candidate's Papers (application to LMS)
[Ref: CWM/LMS/Home/Candidates' Papers, 1798-1899/Box 12]

Engravings & portraits of Robert Morrison and his son, John Robert Morrison
[Ref: CWM/LMS/Home/Missionary Portraits/Box 4]

Main series of Morrison's correspondence from the South China mission field, 1807-1834
[Ref: CWM/LMS/South China/Incoming Correspondence/Boxes 1A, 1B, 2 &3]

Journals kept by Robert Morrison, 1807-1814
[Ref: CWM/LMS/South China/Journals/Box 1]

Correspondence and papers, 1814-1958, of and relating to Robert Morrison and his missionary work, translations, and life in China and Malacca
[Ref: CWM/LMS/China/Personal/Boxes 1-3]

Other Archival Material

Rough manuscript catalogue of the collection of Chinese books that Morrison brought back with him from China, written in Morrison's own hand, and completed whilst aboard the Waterloo en route for England [1824]

[Ref: MS 80823]

Papers relating to Robert Morrison, comprising typescript transcript [1989] of Robert Morrison's manuscript, 'Domestic Memoir of Mrs Morrison', 1824, written as a memorial to his first wife Mary after her death; notes and genealogies of the Morrison family (c1770-1988).

[Ref: MS 380583]

The archive of the China Inland Mission includes a copy of the second edition of the New Testament translated by Robert Morrison, 1815 (and woodblock)

[Ref: CIM/Box 22]

Council for World Mission Library (CWML)

There are a number of publications relating to the life and work of Robert Morrison in the library of the London Missionary Society (now Council for World Mission), which has also been deposited at SOAS. This collection has been catalogued onto the Library Catalogue. Items have the prefix 'CWML' in their class mark and should be ordered from, and consulted in the Special Collections Reading Room.

Robert Morrison Collection of Chinese Books (RM)

SOAS Library also holds the 'Morrison Collection', which comprises the Chinese books accumulated by Robert Morrison during his residence in Guangzhou [Canton] and Macao between 1807 and 1823, together with a small number of 19th century additions. The contents of the library, which cover a broad spectrum of subjects, date from the second half of the 17th century to the first quarter of the 19th, and include some ten thousand Chinese-style thread-bound volumes.

The published 'Catalogue of the Morrison Collection of Chinese Books', by Andrew C. West (SOAS, 1998), is available in the Special Collections Reading Room. The Morrison Collection has also been catalogued onto the Library Catalogue. Items have the prefix 'RM' in their class mark and should be ordered from, and consulted in the Special Collections Reading Room.

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