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## 史 CONTENTS

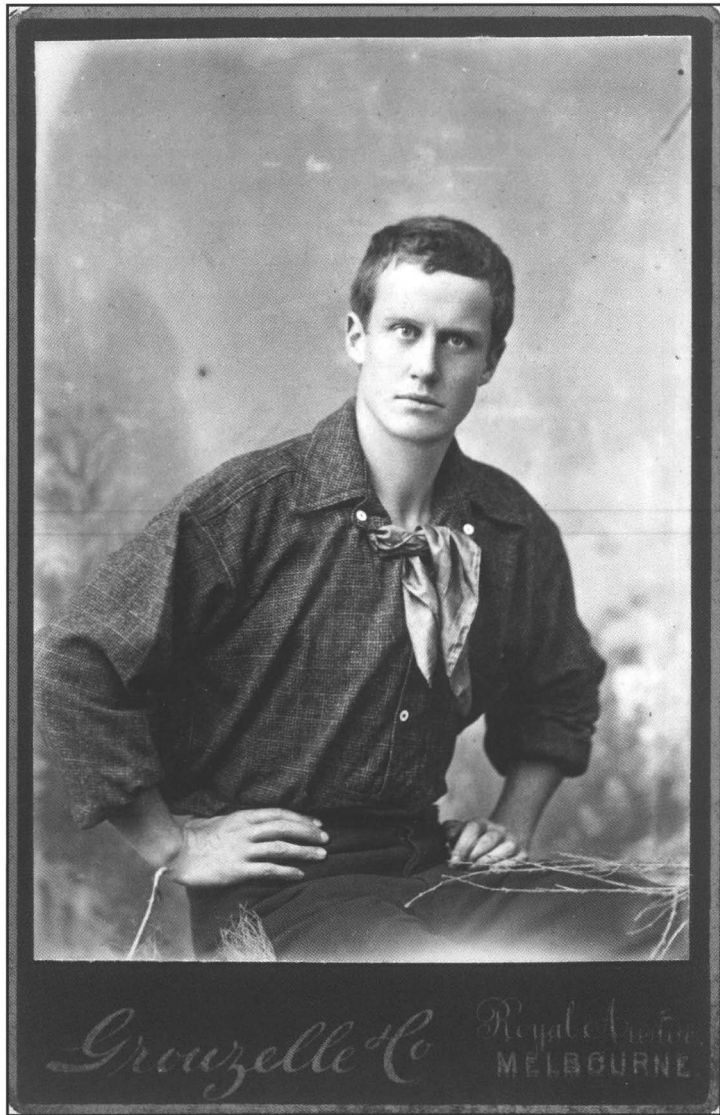
- 1 The Early Days of the Morrison Lecture  
*Benjamin Penny*
- 9 The Objects of the Foundation of the Lectureship, and a Review of Dr Morrison's  
Life in China  
*W.P. Chen*
- 19 Eastern Thought, With More Particular Reference to Confucius  
*William Ab Ket*
- 31 The History and Development of Chinese Art  
*James S. MacDonald*
- 47 The New Culture Movement in China  
*W.P. Chen*
- 61 Reminiscences of George E. Morrison; and Chinese Abroad  
*Wu Lien-Teh*
- 79 China To-day: With Special Reference to Higher Education  
*Chun-Jien Pao*
- 93 The Impact of Western Industrialism on China  
*Aldred F. Barker*
- 113 The Gifts of the Old China to the New  
*S.H. Roberts*
- 117 West China as Seen Through the Eyes of a Westerner  
*Howard Mowll*
- 135 The Min Sheng: A Study in Chinese Democracy  
*W.G. Goddard*
- 155 Lecturers  
*Lindy Shultz*

Cover calligraphy Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿, Tang calligrapher and statesman

Cover image and facing page Morrison aged nineteen

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*Grouzelle & Co*

Royal Victoria  
MELBOURNE

## THE EARLY DAYS OF THE MORRISON LECTURE

 Benjamin Penny

It is now more than seventy-five years since the first “George Ernest Morrison Lecture on Chinese Ethnology” was delivered in May 1932 in Canberra at the Australian Institute of Anatomy, now the National Film and Sound Archive. The lecturer on that occasion was Dr W.P. Chen, the Chinese Consul-General in Australia and Major C.W.C. Marr, the newly appointed Minister for Health in the Lyons Government, was in the chair. Honoured guests included James Scullin, the leader of the Opposition, who had been Prime Minister until the election the previous January; Arthur Blakeley, his Home Affairs Minister, and; Albert Green, most recently his Postmaster-General and Minister for Works and Railways. Also present were Dr J.H.L. Cumpston, Director-General of Health and Sir Colin MacKenzie, Director of the Institute of Anatomy. Newspapers around Australia reported the lecture, as did the *South China Morning Post* in Hong Kong.<sup>1</sup>

This issue of *East Asian History* reprints the Morrison Lectures that were delivered between 1932 and 1941, with the exception of S.H. Roberts’s eighth lecture from 1939, which we have not been able to locate.<sup>2</sup> Now historical documents in their own right, and not easily available, these lectures illuminate the nature of the relationship between Australia and China in the period before the Pacific War and the Communist victory. At that time “Asian Studies” was yet to become a common designation for an accepted area of research in Australia and an active interest in Chinese affairs would have been considered distinctly idiosyncratic.

Sir Colin MacKenzie (1877–1938), the eminent orthopaedist who played a pivotal role in the establishment of the lecture, had developed an interest in the anatomy of Australian animals after the First World War and had established a museum in his own house in St Kilda. He is now, perhaps, best known for founding the Healesville Sanctuary outside Melbourne. In 1923, his anatomical collection became the foundation of the new National

<sup>1</sup> *The Canberra Times*, 21/10/1932, p.4.

<sup>2</sup> The Number 11 (June 1996) issue of *East Asian History* published a selection of Morrison Lectures from 1951–1996.

<sup>3</sup> Brendan G. O’Keefe, “History of the Australian Institute of Anatomy now the National Film and Sound Archive,” in Philip Cox Richardson Taylor and Partners, *Conservation Plan Final Report*, July 1995, p. 18.

Museum of Australian Zoology with MacKenzie as its first Director. The new institution, renamed the Australian Institute of Anatomy, moved into its recently completed Canberra home in 1930.

In the early 1930s, Canberra’s population was somewhat less than 10,000 and opportunities for cultural and educational diversion were rather limited (the Australian National University would not exist until 1946). Nonetheless, the relatively few residents of the newly established capital were typically highly educated and well informed. The Institute itself, in the 1930s, and indeed through to the 1960s, was one of Canberra’s tourist attractions, undoubtedly due to the fact that it housed the heart of Phar Lap, Australia’s most famous racehorse (1926–32) and the alleged skull of Ned Kelly (1854–1880). It was, in a sense, a kind of de facto national museum as well as being the focus of much of the town’s cultural life: Canberra University College had classes there until 1935 and the Canberra Repertory Society and the Arts and Literature Society used the Institute for their activities until 1944.

One of the ways that MacKenzie devised for establishing the Institute as a focus for learned discussion was the endowment of several orations and lectureships. Of the five that were founded, four were on scientific or medical subjects. One was the Halford Oration in memory of G.B. Halford, Chair of Anatomy and Physiology at the University of Melbourne under whom MacKenzie would have studied. Given at the Institute until 1947, this oration transferred to the University of Melbourne in 1948, where it exists today as a triennial public lecture. Another was the Kendall Lectureship in veterinary science, now administered by the Australian Veterinary Association. Two more were devoted to preventative medicine and the history of human development, and the history of medicine, respectively.<sup>3</sup> The Morrison Lectureship, the fourth to be established, therefore, stands out as a striking exception.

The note that accompanies the original printed versions of the lectures states that “The George Ernest Morrison Lecture in Ethnology has been founded by Chinese residents in Australia in honour of the late Dr G.E. Morrison, a native of Geelong, Victoria, Australia”. The names of the two “Chinese residents” usually credited with the founding of the Lectureship are “Mr William Liu, merchant, of Sydney and Mr William Ah Ket, the distinguished Supreme Court Barrister in Melbourne”. Two other names appear in this note: Mackenzie and a senior public servant in the Ministry for Home Affairs, F.J. Quinlan. Quinlan, who by 1931 was Assistant Secretary of the department, had carried on a correspondence with William Liu (1893–1983) for some years concerning the residency status of Chinese people who had come into difficulties under the discriminatory legislation of the White Australia Policy, against which Liu (and Ah Ket, 1876–1936) fought for decades. Quinlan later became Chief Electoral Officer for the Commonwealth. By the early 1930s, the correspondence between Quinlan and Liu, as preserved in Liu’s papers in the Mitchell Library in Sydney, shows that, apart from their formal relationship, they had developed what appears to be a genuine friendship, with some of their letters straying into general

Chinese affairs, especially relating to Liu's visits to China, and family news.

When Liu was in Canberra in 1931 arranging the formalities for a forth-coming trip to Hong Kong, Canton and Shanghai, Quinlan put him in touch with MacKenzie, who was hatching his plan for the Morrison Lectureship. As Liu recalled in an oral history interview he gave to the National Library of Australia in 1978:

Well now, something happened, I had to go to Canberra. In that time Quinlan became Assistant Secretary of the proper name, Immigration Department, Canberra, so he said, "Mr Liu, I particularly want you to call over to the Institute of Anatomy to meet Sir Colin MacKenzie, who for a number of years had been trying to establish a Lectureship in honour of Geelong born Victorian Morrison, George Ernest Morrison, who was adviser to the Manchus and Dr Sun Yat Sen and had so much to do; a man who said, "if he were in 1897 in Peking, if he were a Chinese, as much as he was British, he would do exactly as the Chinese and become a Boxer, and fight the world", you see. You know, I went over with my father-in-law, he went with me to Canberra, that trip, and when we got there a fine old gentleman met us in the door, wearing white cap, a white coat, and we were taken around and he showed us the specimens of the Australian Institute of Anatomy and by the time we reached that big showcase where they had Ned Kelly's head in it, skull in it, I said, "By the way Sir, we haven't been introduced, there's my father-in-law Mr Quoy and myself, as you know, Bill Liu, what's your name Sir?" He said, "They call me Colin". "Oh", I said, "Colin MacKenzie, the man that Quinlan sent me over to see". Well, we settled down and talked and I told him, I said, "The part you want me to play in it, would be to raise money in the Chinese Community and also they have Chinese names. I understand these things, being connected with the Consulate and the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and all that, but it's a very bad time, Sir Colin, with the Depression on, and the Chinese, a lot of them out of work. We might find a way, but there's one way, one way, if you can get Mr Quinlan to act as in-between and he writes to – he knows Billy Ah Ket, the Barrister, you know, in Melbourne, well, and if you can get Billy Ah Ket to handle Melbourne Chinatown I'll handle Sydney Chinatown and in that way we may be able to raise some thousands of pounds to get it going. Well, it happened, we succeeded, we got money, not as much as Sir Colin had wanted, but Lady MacKenzie and Sir Colin, under the Health Department, I think they got some help, printing and all that kind of thing, you know how these things are done, and got it established.<sup>4</sup>

A week or so after they had met, MacKenzie wrote to Liu on 7 October 1931, stressing his vision of Australia's regional importance as a Pacific nation:

The Australian Institute of Anatomy has been founded by the Commonwealth Government for the advancement of medical science and can be regarded as the first unit of the National University of Australia. One big

<sup>4</sup> "Conversation with William Liu", Hazel de Berg Collection, National Library of Australia. Liu also recalled the formation of the Morrison Lectureship in a short document entitled "The Birth of 'George Ernest Morrison Lectureship in Ethnology' in May 1931" that he wrote on 20 September, 1979 at the time of the 40th lecture given by Wang Gungwu, Morrison Lecture Files, ANU Archives.



<sup>5</sup> Letter from Mackenzie to Liu, 7/10/1931, William J. Liu papers, Mitchell Library, Sydney, "Papers concerning the George Ernest Morrison Lecture in Ethnology," ML MSS 6294/5.

<sup>6</sup> Letter from Liu to MacKenzie, 15/10/1931, Morrison Lecture Files, ANU Archives.

phase of our work in the Institute is the research work which is carried out on the unique animals of Australia to help in the understanding of human health and disease along the lines of comparative anatomy, which is the basis of all the medical sciences. Our intention is to make Canberra one of the great centres of medical research in the Pacific. It is one of our ideals to have as many lectures and orations on scientific subjects as possible, with the object of bringing the latest researches [sic] before the public. In this regard there are already two annual Orations and one Lectureship endowed. Each Oration was founded by the presentation of £1,000, and the interest on this is paid each year to the Orator.

At the present time relationships between Australia and the East, and especially China, are the subject of increasing attention, and, as I have mentioned in our conversation last week, the cultural aspect is as important as the commercial. A great Australian, the late Dr Morrison, laboured hard in the interests of China, and I am venturing to suggest the foundation of a Lectureship in his memory to be delivered in the Lecture Theatre of the Institute annually on the subject of Ethnology. If such were funded by Chinese citizens it would be a remarkable gesture of scientific friendship from China to Australia, and especially if the first lecture were delivered by the Consul-General for China. Such a Lectureship could be founded for £300, and the annual interest on this would go to the lecturer for his expenses. A suggested title would be the "Morrison Lecture on Ethnology". So important do I regard this that I would willingly start the subscription list with £10 – anonymously – and surely it would not be difficult for e.g. 29 Chinese citizens to subscribe a like amount.<sup>5</sup>

Liu replied on the 15th:

I duly received your letter dated 7th instant regarding the proposal of a Lectureship in memory of that Great Australian the late Dr Morrison and his work in China, and I am sure, if this can be brought about, it would do a great deal to help the two people – Australian and Chinese to mutually understand each other for the permanent good of the two nations, and, as promised, I shall be happy to co-operate in the hope of bring the proposal to success.

As Mr F.J. Quinlan of The Department of Home Affairs is probably the best authority in Canberra in matters relating to Chinese, having contact with us over many many years in his official capacity, I have written to him, as he is on the spot, to get in touch with you, so that we together, might co-operate in handling the matter in the manner the subject rightly deserves, and as I have had to put off my trip till November, I have a few more weeks to do something to further same before I leave. Meantime, I trust you and Mr Quinlan will have some plan ready.

I expect to be accompanying Dr W.P. Chen, Consul-General for China to Canberra early next week, so we will have the pleasure of meeting again.

I have noted with appreciation, the kind and generous lead you made in your offer of £10 – anonymously – towards the above proposal, and I have pleasure in following with £10 as a subscription as from myself.<sup>6</sup>

A little over two weeks later, on October 31, a letter had been despatched to “selected Chinese friends” over the signatures of William Liu, G.Y.T. Quoy, presumably Liu’s father-in-law, Gock Chew, and Mar Sun Gee.<sup>7</sup> By December 1, when Quinlan wrote to Liu, MacKenzie had been in touch with Ah Ket in Melbourne, who reported that he already had promises of £100. But, as Quinlan noted, “I understand that the trouble in Manchuria was responsible for slowing down greater progress which Mr Ah Ket had hoped to make in Melbourne”, Japan having invaded on September 19 following the Mukden incident.<sup>8</sup> By the 18th, MacKenzie was able to write formally to Cumpston informing him that:

With the view of improving the cultural relationships between China and Australia and of honouring the name of a great Australian, Dr Ernest Morrison, Chinese residents in Australia decided to found a Lectureship in Ethnology in connection with the Australian Institute of Anatomy. Support was given to the idea by the Consul-General for China; and in Melbourne Mr W. Ah Ket, the well-known Supreme Court Barrister, made himself responsible for receiving subscriptions and Mr Liu, importer of Sydney, undertook this work for that city.<sup>9</sup>

Each year, Mackenzie continued, the lecturer was to be chosen by the Minister of Health, the Director of the Institute, and the Chinese Consul-General who had deputized Ah Ket to act in his stead. Two days later, MacKenzie wrote to Liu to let him know that Ah Ket had presented him with a cheque for £210 when he was in Melbourne for Christmas, and that the total funds had reached £402. Thus, the Morrison Lecture was formally established and the Chinese Consul-General was invited to give the first lecture.<sup>10</sup>

Precisely why MacKenzie was so enthusiastic to establish a Lectureship about China remains a mystery. It is unclear whether MacKenzie had any personal connections with Morrison or, indeed, had visited China. He was from Melbourne and Morrison was from Geelong, but while both were graduates in medicine, Mackenzie initially undertook his training at the University of Melbourne while Morrison studied in Edinburgh. MacKenzie had undertaken further medical studies in Edinburgh but by the time he arrived there in 1903, Morrison had been gone for some 15 years, and had, indeed, already been in China for ten. It appears from the correspondence that MacKenzie knew Quinlan before the arrangements for the Lectureship were made. Given that, according to Liu, he was “probably the best authority in Canberra in matters relating to Chinese”, the suggestion for such a Lecture may have come from Quinlan.

One notable aspect of the Morrison Lectureship in its early years was the support and involvement of the Chinese Consulate-General. We have seen that W.P. Chen gave the first lecture and the Consul-General was on the committee charged with selecting speakers. In addition, Chen also gave the fourth lecture in 1935 and his successor, Chun-jien Pao, gave the sixth. William Ah Ket, who was in charge of the Melbourne fundraising and who gave the second lecture, also had close ties with the Chinese government, having been the Victorian delegate to the Conference of Overseas Chinese at the first sitting of the Chinese national parliament

<sup>7</sup> Letter from Liu, et.al. to “selected Chinese friends,” 31/10/1931, Morrison Lecture Files, ANU Archives.

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Quinlan to Liu, 1/12/1931, William J. Liu papers, “1917–1933 Correspondence,” Mitchell Library, Sydney, ML MSS 6294/1.

<sup>9</sup> Letter from MacKenzie to Cumpston, 18/1/1932, Morrison Lecture Files, ANU Archives. William Liu seems also to have seen commercial benefits flowing from the Morrison Lectureship. In a letter to Mr Rountree of G.S.Yuill & Co, owners of the Australian Oriental Line that sailed between Australia and Hong Kong, dated June 1932, Liu says that the lectureship was “now more than ever ... a step in the right direction, only that we need to encourage the trustees to keep the Sino-Australian question more continuously before the Australian public instead of relying only upon the annual lectureship, at the same time, to be constantly backed up by the interested parties, such as Merchants, Steamship companies and other well wishers of these worthy objects, then favourable public opinion may be assured”. Letter from Liu to Mr Rountree, 8/6/1932, William J. Liu papers, “1917–1933 Correspondence,” Mitchell Library, Sydney, ML MSS 6294/1.

<sup>10</sup> In April 1932, Quinlan reported to Liu that, “Sir Colin MacKenzie has forwarded a lot of material I understand to the Consul-General to enable him to prepare his lecture, so I hope and feel confident that it will be well-handled”. Letter from Quinlan to Liu, 13/4/1932, William J. Liu papers, “1917–1933 Correspondence,” Mitchell Library, Sydney, ML MSS 6294/1.

<sup>11</sup> On Ah Ket, see John Lack, "Ah Ket, William (1876–1936)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 7 (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1979), pp.19–20; Toylan Ah Ket, "William Ah Ket-Building Bridges between Occident and Orient in Australia, 1900–1936," <<http://www.chaf.lib.latrobe.edu.au/stories/wahket.htm>> (accessed 28/4/09); John Fitzgerald, *Big White Lie: Chinese Australians in White Australia* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2007), p.14.

<sup>12</sup> On Liu, see Charlotte Jordon Greene, "‘Fantastic Dreams’: William Liu, and the Origins and Influence of Protest against the White Australia Policy in the 20th Century", University of Sydney PhD, 2005; Mo Yimei and Mo Xiangyi, *William Liu OBE 1893–1983: Pathfinder* (Sydney: Australia-China Chamber of Commerce and Industry of NSW, 1991); Fitzgerald, *Big White Lie*, p.14–15.

<sup>13</sup> Letter from Liu to Quinlan 9/6/1941, Morrison Lecture Files, ANU Archives.

under Sun Yat-sen in 1912. He was also Acting Chinese Consul-General in 1913–14, and later in 1917.<sup>11</sup> William Liu also had long-standing connections with the Nationalist government. From 1912–14, he served as English translator and clerk at the Melbourne Chinese Consulate and later in 1921, as English Secretary of the Nationalist Party in Sydney, he met Sun Yat-sen in Canton.<sup>12</sup>

The Morrison Lectures clearly became a regular feature of the Canberra social and intellectual scene until 1941 when they were suspended due to the war. The cream of society are reported to have attended: the Governor-General and the Governor of New South Wales both made an appearance, while government ministers and senior public servants, as well as churchmen and educationalists were often in attendance. In 1935 R.G (later Lord) Casey, at the time Acting Treasurer, was in the chair, as was Sir Robert Garran, the thrice-knighted, retired Solicitor General, in 1941. In 1939 and 1940, during his first term as Prime Minister, Robert Menzies attended. Until 1937, when Sir Colin MacKenzie retired to Melbourne, Lady MacKenzie hosted supper in the Northern Museum of the Institute.

A few days after the Morrison lecture was held in June 1941, Liu wrote to Quinlan in a reflective mood:

While at Canberra, I suggested to Dr Clements [MacKenzie's successor as Director of the Institute] that since some of the lectures are out of print and this being the tenth address, I thought it a worthy step forward to have the ten lectures printed and bound in a single volume with an appropriate preface and foreword. With a good photo of Morrison, followed by one of the late Sir Colin, as founder of the lectureship and an additional Chinese foreword by Dr Pao, I think, would complete the volume as an historical record of recent years' work in connection with Sino-Australian relations. I would also add that the front page should have a Chinese translation of the book.<sup>13</sup>

That volume never appeared. Almost seven decades later, *East Asian History* reprints all but one of the lectures Liu refers to in this issue. The missing lecture given by S.H. Roberts is represented here by the report on it from *The Canberra Times*. Since these lectures are themselves historical documents, we have waived the journal's normal requirements of style, preferring to reproduce the texts as closely as possible to the originals. This means, for instance, that the names of Chinese cities are rendered in romanizations now not often encountered, and infelicities of expression have not been corrected. We have also included biographical notes on each lecturer and, where possible, photographs of them. Finally, between the text of each lecture we have reproduced a photograph of Morrison himself. These photographs come from the extraordinary archive of Morrison's papers in the Mitchell Library, Sydney.

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*Morrison with Laob Wan, 1894*