

Power Shift: Reinterpreting the G.E. Morrison Collection

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The Asian Conference on Literature & Librarianship 2015
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

The Dr George E. Morrison Collection of diaries, manuscripts and photographs – held by the State Library of New South Wales (Australia) – provides a unique suite of insights into the power of communication, between East and West, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. George Morrison, sometimes referred to as Morrison of Peking, worked, in China, as a correspondent for *The Times* and so exercised both influence and power in the development of East-West relations. This paper explores this power and how power, in Australian-Chinese relations, has been repositioned by subsequent key Australian figures visiting China, including former Prime Ministers Gough Whitlam and Kevin Rudd. In addition this paper will unpack how, as custodians for this important material, the State Library of New South Wales facilitates new stories from this Collection. Indeed, the Morrison Collection represents a rich reservoir for research but requires innovative responses after decades of traditional scholarly activity in this area. Such innovation is designed to inspire more use of this Collection as well as more creative interpretations of the materials within it, thus sharing and shifting power across the literature, the librarians who care for it and the scholars who will reinterpret this valuable material today and in the future.

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Introduction

The Dr George Ernest (G.E.) Morrison Collection, dominated by diaries, manuscripts and photographs – held by the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales (Australia) – provides a unique suite of insights into the power of communication, between East and West, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. George Ernest, or G.E., Morrison (sometimes referred to as Chinese Morrison, or as Morrison of Peking) was a man who was aware of his place in history which presents both challenges and opportunities for those working with the Morrison materials:

a Collection of items created by, as well as collected by, Morrison throughout his life. Of particular concern for many researchers is the idea of producing histories from correspondence and diaries – which in many respects provide the essence of this particular Collection – that were written, predominantly, within a framework of anticipation of a wider audience. This is despite there being some identified differences between these works and writings presented, by Morrison, through his journalism which was intended for a more immediate and much more extensive readership. Moreover, there was a public anticipation surrounding the diaries as noted by A.E. Hippisley who, in writing one of Morrison's obituaries, 'Dr George Ernest Morrison' for *The Geographical Journal*, emphasised the importance of these records, when he stated that: 'Morrison kept a minute and carefully compiled diary, the publication of which would throw many valuable and interesting side-lights on events in the Far East during the last quarter of a century' (1920).

The ultimate aim of this paper is, not to explore George Morrison's life in detail, but to explore how the George E. Morrison Collection might be interrogated by a variety of scholars. It is hoped that this work will serve as a case study and might be utilised by library and information services professionals within institutions that hold collections which share two key characteristics with the George E. Morrison Collection: complexity and volume.

George E. Morrison: The Collection

In the context of this Collection the items that were brought together and produced for a multi-generational audience – which presents issues of superimposing, upon events and persons, a filter which Morrison constructed that, in various ways, at some points constrict and at other points guide the interpretation of this archive – presents traditional challenges to the researcher working with these types of records. Another challenge for researchers is the sheer size of the Collection which presents items across several formats, including: diaries; letters; newspaper clippings; and photographs, most of which focus on life in China during the late 1800s and early 1900s.

The Library is also custodian of several important objects, including personal items, belonging to Morrison, such as: cutlery; a leather satchel and a pen knife; small pieces of a spear removed from Morrison's nose and abdomen after being attacked while on an expedition in New Guinea in 1883; and a six centimetre bronze Peking Siege Medal which was awarded to him for bravery, having been wounded whilst undertaking a rescue, during the Boxer Rebellion in 1900.

The core of the Collection comprises 238 boxes and volumes of manuscripts; 21

boxes and volumes of photographs, drawings and prints as well as a box of glass negatives, a miniature and four etchings; and two boxes of realia which contain over 30 items (some of which are described briefly above). These items are supplemented by a series of subject files, of which there are 139 volumes and six boxes, accounting for 5.5 linear meters of shelf space, that contain correspondence accompanied by notes, memoranda, news cuttings, printed material, agreements, maps, certificates and various other documents. These subject files are augmented by the Morrison Miscellanea. This component of the Collection is made up of nine volumes and six boxes of textual material and ephemera including invitations, invoices, visiting cards, receipts, notebooks, tickets and menus. This Miscellanea serves to facilitate an increased comprehension of George E. Morrison and the worlds – from Australia to China and beyond – that he occupied. So too, does Morrison's Correspondence and Letter Books, covering the period 1850-1923, of which there are 78 volumes and two boxes of material.

The volumes of newspaper cuttings, curated by Morrison, which reflect Western and Eastern journalism, reveal a narrative of power relations between East and West while simultaneously serving to offer a commentary on the power of this type of mass communication, fill 41 boxes and one volume. These cuttings from Western newspapers – covering the period between 1873 and 1935 – are also a valuable source of detail for researchers, as are the additional five boxes of cuttings from the English editions of Chinese newspapers. There is also, within the Collection, a series of seven boxes of textual material being works for publication.

The substance for much scholarly activity on Morrison has been his diaries of which the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales holds 62 volumes. A digitised copy of a diary entry, made by Morrison, on New Year's Day 1906, appears at Figure 1.

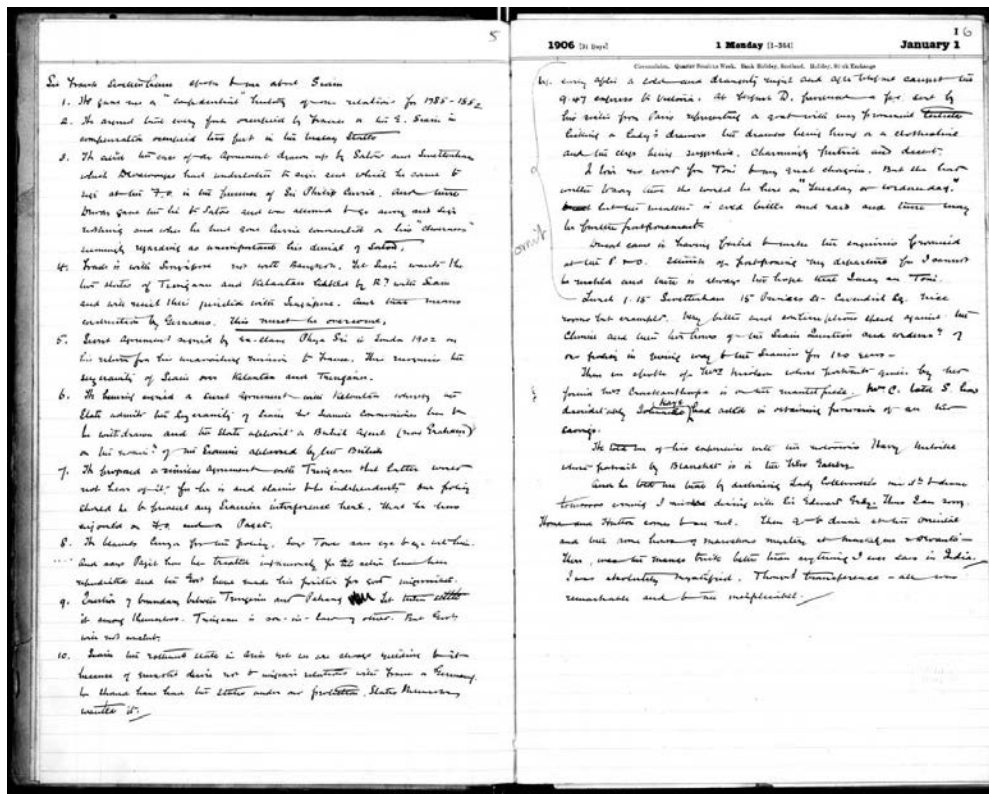


Figure 1. George Ernest Morrison's Diary. 1 January 1906-29 March 1906.
Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW. MLMSS 312 / 12 / Item 2

The Library has published a guide to the Collection, *Guide to the Papers of George Ernest Morrison in the Mitchell Library, Sydney* (1977) compiled by Sybil Blanton. In addition to producing this *Guide*, the 1970s witnessed a number of efforts to make this Collection more accessible. This included a program to microfilm the diaries and to digitise some of the photographs within the Collection.

Yet the scale and scope of the Collection is such that it creates a situation in which the researcher is routinely confined to identifying and exploring fragments of a life instead of a clear, linear story. The Collection, however, has the potential to be segmented with individual stories, that are in addition to the central story of Morrison, that can be investigated in depth and integrated with other stories in ways that present new ways to appreciate – and critically – to understand this unique Collection. Of course the widely-recognised importance of the Collection has seen numerous scholars face, and successfully overcome, these, and other, challenges to produce an extensive suite of regularly cited biographical, historical and political works from Morrison's oeuvre. There is, obviously, more to be done and this paper seeks to highlight the potential to draw new stories from a Collection that has been held since 1946, when the Collection was given to the Mitchell Library by the Morrison family, and, since that time, has been accessed regularly to produce presentations and publications, some of which are discussed below.

George E. Morrison: An Unusual Life

Before listing some of the research efforts that have been made, utilising the George E. Morrison Collection, it is important to ask: 'Who was George Morrison?' George Ernest Morrison was born in Geelong – a city which is, today, the second largest in Victoria after the state's capital Melbourne – Australia, on 4 February 1862. Morrison would grow up in his home state but much of his life would be spent overseas, until his death, from 'inanition associated with chronic pancreatitis,' on 30 May 1920 in Sidmouth, in Devon on the South West of England (Gregory 1986).



Figure 2. George Ernest Morrison as a Young Man.

Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW.

Morrison was a man who, even by today's standards, would be considered an adventurer. In 1880 he undertook the first, of what would be many, lengthy walks, travelling from Geelong, along the coast to Adelaide in South Australia. A journey of approximately 1,200 kilometres (Gregory 1986) this walk was detailed in a diary and subsequently sold for publication in *Leader*.

A more substantial publication would appear five years later in book form, after another major walk, this time on foreign soil, as *An Australian in China: Being a Narrative of a Quiet Journey across China to Burma* (1895).

In the first week of February, 1894, I returned to Shanghai from Japan. It was my intention to go up the Yangtse River as far as Chungking, and then, dressed as a Chinese, to cross quietly over Western China, the Chinese Shan States, and Kachin Hills to the frontier of Burma. The ensuing narrative will tell how easily and pleasantly this journey, which a few years ago would have been regarded as a formidable undertaking, can now be done.

The journey was, of course, in no sense one of exploration; it consisted simply of a voyage of 1500 miles up the Yangtse River, followed by a quiet, though extended, excursion of another 1500 miles along the great overland highway into Burma, taken by one who spoke no Chinese, who had no interpreter or companion, who was unarmed, but who trusted implicitly in the good faith of the Chinese. Anyone in the world can cross over to Burma in the way I did, provided he be willing to exercise for a certain number of weeks or months some endurance – for he will have to travel many miles on foot over a mountainous country – and much forbearance. (Morrison 1895, 1)

Morrison's travels, and his recordings of these, would bring him celebrity status. The engaging style in which he wrote – telling of easy and pleasant journeys, rather than arduous and dangerous expeditions – would certainly have contributed to the popularity of these texts.

Despite these travels, and some other interruptions to his university studies, Morrison would qualify as a medical practitioner in late 1887 (graduating from the University of Edinburgh, rather than the University of Melbourne as he had originally intended), pursuing the world of medicine in Spain as well as Australia. Yet he would, ultimately, return to writing – in the form of journalism – and went on to work, in China, as a correspondent for *The Times* and, throughout his career, exercised both influence and power in the development of East-West relations. This appointment was made after he had undertaken his spectacular walk, noted above, of 5,000 kilometres, in 1894, across China from Shanghai to Rangoon. This situates Morrison in a unique space as both a tourist in, and as an interpreter of, China.

Morrison's timing also greatly influenced him as a man, journalist and collector. His work in China coincided with major historical events including the Boxer Rebellion in Peking in 1900, the Russo-Japanese War of 1905 and other international happenings. In 1912 Morrison resigned from his post with *The Times* to become a political adviser to the President of the new Chinese Republic: Yuan Shi-kai. Amidst such professional

change, his personal life also underwent a transformation when he married New Zealander Jennie Wark Robin, with whom he had three sons. Morrison would continue to be connected to important points on historical timelines including the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919 which he attended as a member of the Chinese Delegation. Morrison's health was, however, in decline at this time and he died, in England, the following year.



Figure 3. Jennie Wark Robin in a Lounge Chair, Peking.
Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW.

It is fascinating to note that as the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales now holds the Morrison Collection, Morrison himself was a great collector and built an impressive library while he was in China. In 1917 Morrison sold his library of Western language works on China (including over 20,000 volumes as well as maps and pamphlets) to Baron Hisaya Iwasaki, a former president of the Mitsubishi Corporation, for £35,000 (over AUD \$3,148,000 in 2014).

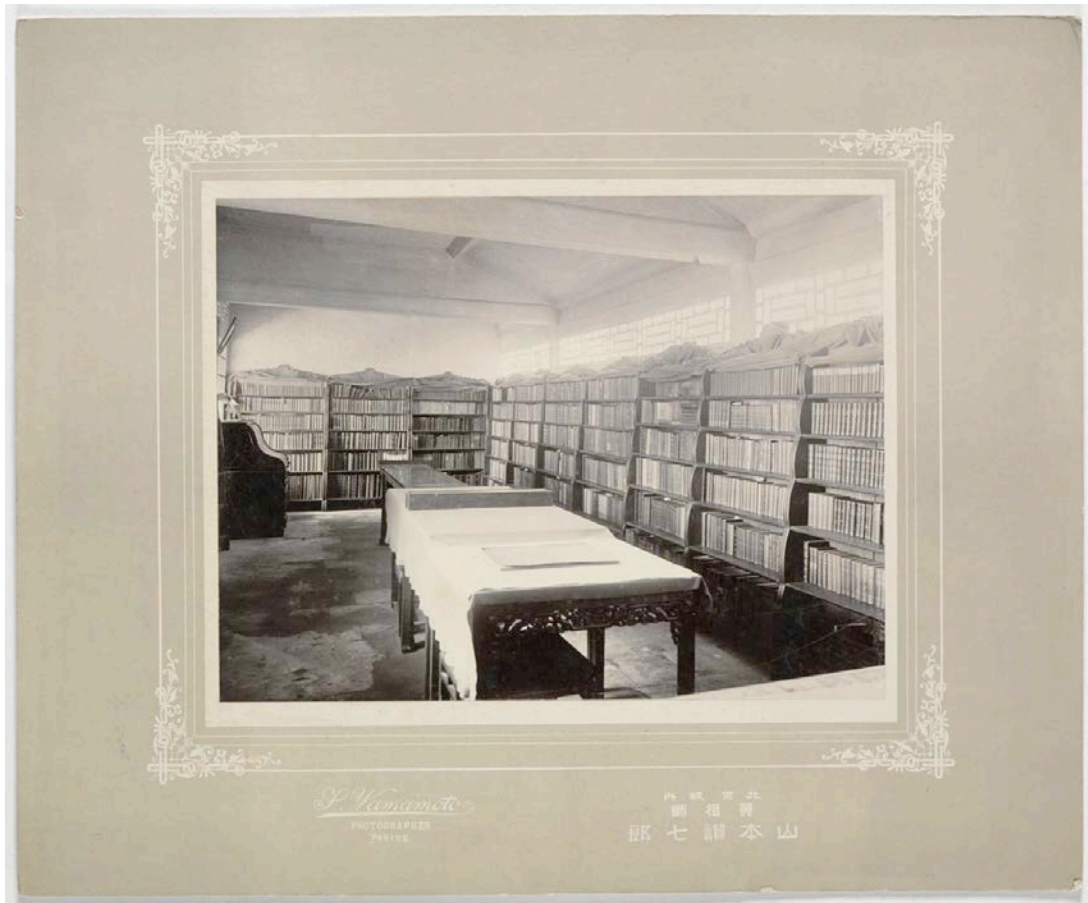


Figure 4. Photograph of George Ernest Morrison's Library, Peking. Circa 1917. Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW. PX*D 152

Morrison, despite his connection to, and regular defences of, China (Morrison is acknowledged, throughout much of the literature dedicated to his life and times, for his sympathy with and understanding of China; he would react with outrage against Westerners that insulted and misunderstood China and he obviously held great hopes for the nation's future), was very much a child of Empire. He was also a man who was proud of being an Australian. His personal bookplate, reproduced below, demonstrates this. The plate features many of the traditional hallmarks of an enthusiastic collector with the owner's name dominant, a banner supporting the script and a heavy border. The plate also features a variety of flora and fauna unique to Australia including a kangaroo and an emu (two animals which are prominent on the Coat of Arms of Australia).



Figure 5. Photograph of George Ernest Morrison's Bookplate, from a Volume held in the Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW. Photograph R. Franks.

Power: From Morrison to Whitlam and Rudd

One of the purposes of this paper is to explore, though briefly, the idea of power and how power, in Australian-Chinese relations, has been repositioned by subsequent key Australian figures visiting China, including former Prime Ministers Gough Whitlam and Kevin Rudd. Between Morrison and Whitlam, and later between Whitlam and Rudd, there were several visits to China from Australia, as well as a wide variety of Westerners, yet the mythology around the mysterious East endured at least until 1972 when diplomatic relations between Australia and China were normalised and considered routine by both political commentators and the general public.

Upon being elected Prime Minister of Australia, in late 1972, Gough Whitlam began delivering upon his promised programs of reform. One of the new Prime Minister's announcements was 'the first step towards recognition of China' (Mitchell 2014, 170). Controversially, Whitlam had visited China, the year before. He was immediately attacked, by then Prime Minister, William McMahon who declared the excursion 'a stunt' but East-West relations were destined for change. Within one day of Whitlam's work in China being covered on mainstream media around the world the then President of the United States of America, Richard Nixon, announced he would make an official visit to the country within ten months (Mitchell 2014, 160).

It is popularly believed in Australia that Prime Minister Gough Whitlam established an ongoing relationship with China. There is no doubt that the visit in 1972 was a pivotal moment for the economic, cultural and diplomatic relations between the two nations. Similarly, Kevin Rudd, who was Prime Minister of Australia between 2007 and 2010 and again, for less than three months, in 2013, heralded – aided by his fluency in Mandarin – a new openness and familiarity between the two countries. It is an easy trope for a leader to have exploited. To open up, to visit, to pave the way, to build the foundations and to have ‘discovered’ China. As the Morrison Collection clearly attests, Australia’s relationship with China has deep roots and is more complex than is commonly assumed.

This relationship, today, is reflected in Australian exports to China, Chinese investment in Australia and the recent signing, on 17 November 2014, of the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement, an Agreement that, ‘lays a historic foundation for the next phase of Australia’s economic relationship with China’ (austrade 2014, online). Some of the outcomes of this relationship can also be seen in the wide variety of cultural and educational exchanges the two nations enjoy. It is interesting to imagine whether George E. Morrison foresaw the extent and nature of Australia’s contemporary relationship with China. His unique understanding of both countries would certainly have placed him in a position to conceptualise how this relationship might develop. That Morrison could have conceived of the acceleration of investment levels (particularly around agriculture and raw resources) and the extraordinary numbers of tourists – which would transform travel between Australia and China from an ‘adventure’ to the ‘every day’ – is, of course, speculation.

Political power, which in broad terms has been well documented elsewhere, has, specifically for Australia been crafted out of power relations inherited from England. For this paper the idea of shifting power is of special interest. For example if we shift the central story of Morrison – not to exclude him from the narrative but to allow other voices within the stories of this Collection to be heard in different ways – how does power, and the perception of power, change?

Telling Traditional Stories

Much of the work around Morrison focuses on the man; and the structure of the archive easily facilitates this approach. The archive, designed as noted above to be digested by an audience much wider than Morrison’s immediate circle of correspondents prioritises, by default, the personal story. As a result a significant amount of scholarship presents the items within the Collection in the exclusive context of Morrison and we profile here some of the more outstanding, as well as more well-known, examples of intellectual engagement with the Morrison story.

Lectures

An excellent example of a scholarly suite of presentations on China in general and Morrison in particular can be seen in the George E. Morrison Lecture Series. Established in 1932 ‘to honour for all time the memory of a great Australian who rendered valuable services to China and to improve cultural relations between China and Australia’ (ANU 2014), the Series recently celebrated 75 years of presenting scholarship in this area. The inaugural lecture, presented by W.P. Chen, focused on Morrison himself, *The Objects of the Foundation of the Lectureship, and a Review of Dr Morrison’s Life in China*, was delivered on 10 May 1932. In this way Australia

reflected upon power relations and power frameworks while acknowledging that the nation's relationship with China was an important one to be pursued.

Other lectures, within this Series, to focus on Morrison include H.V. Evatt's *Some Aspects of Morrison's Life and Work* (1952) and Linda Jaivin's *Morrison's World* (2011). Many of the lectures analyse elements of Chinese cultural, philosophical and political life. Today, the Series is administered by the Contemporary China Centre, within the Department of Political and Social Change, at the Australian National University.

Articles

There are a wide range of articles – from journal-based to web-based pieces – that exclusively explore Morrison or acknowledge Morrison as part of a wider storytelling project. These works include: S. Couling's work on Morrison's library (1917) and Claire Roberts' work on Morrison's studio and library (2008); articles around Australians travelling to China including Frances Wood's work 'Marco Polo, Orientalism and the Experience of China: Australian Travel Accounts of Mao's Republic' (2004) for the *Asian Studies Review*. Morrison is also mentioned in studies of journalism including Winston G. Lewis' research which produced 'The Quest for William Henry Donald (1875-1946): That Other Australian in China' (1988) for the *Asian Studies Association of Australia*.

Books

Of course many books have been produced, by Morrison, as well as others. Key texts include Morrison's memoir *An Australian in China: Being the Narrative of a Quiet Journey across China to Burma* (1895) which was republished in 1985, with an introduction by David Bonavia. There are also biographies available including *The Man Who Died Twice: The Life and Adventures of Morrison of Peking* (2004) and *The Life and Adventures of Morrison of China* (2007) both by Peter Thompson and Robert Macklin and an earlier biography, *Morrison of Peking* (1967 with imprints in 1968, 1970, 1981 and 1991) by Cyril Pearl. There is also a visually striking photographic essay, *G.E. Morrison's Journey in Northwest China in 1910* (2008), with original captions and photographs by Morrison that have been compiled and translated by Dou Kim and Helen Lo. Scholarship has also taken the form of edited collections including Lo Hui-Min's work on Morrison's correspondence, a two-volume opus titled *The Correspondence of G.E. Morrison* (1976-1978). Many of these, and other, works are offered in the context of Morrison the man; which the authors of this work do not deny is a compelling tale. Yet there are multiple contexts in which these items can be placed that could – not necessarily be designed to exclude Morrison from the narrative – but rather re-position Morrison as a minor player. This could open up opportunities to utilise the Morrison Collection in different and innovative ways.

Facilitating New Stories

As noted above, the ultimate aim of this paper is to explore how the George E. Morrison Collection might continue to be utilised as described here as well as highlight how the Collection can be interrogated by a variety of scholars to generate a new suite of stories from this valuable material. How do library and information professionals, as custodians for this Collection at the State Library of New South Wales encourage new stories about, and around, George E. Morrison? Similarly, how can library and information professionals working with collections that are equally

significant – both in the size of the collection as well as the complexity of the items within that collection – also work to facilitate increased use. Indeed, the Morrison Collection represents a rich reservoir for research but requires innovative responses after decades of traditional scholarly activity in this area. Such innovation is designed to inspire more use of this Collection as well as more creative interpretations of the materials within it, thus sharing and shifting power across the literature, the librarians who care for it and the scholars who will reinterpret this valuable material today and in the future.

In many respects this paper is an invitation to re-think and re-purpose the materials within the Collection. To pursue the idea, for example, of inter-disciplinary efforts that would change the lens with which these items are viewed. To select a sliver of content and to unpack what that might mean for researchers working in a wide variety of disciplines. We list here a few of the possible ways forward.

Photography

The extensive examples of photography within the George E. Morrison Collection present numerous opportunities for scholars studying photography in particular and the content found within photographic collections more generally (including details around the photographers and framing styles). The photographs in this Collection can be examined and interpreted through multiple lenses including minority populations in remote China, architectural heritage, the history of place, as well as in context of some of the rapid industrialisation and urban development in China and the loss of some historical memory.

Women's Studies

Much of the material within the Collection relates to George Morrison's family life in China at the turn of the twentieth century. This includes the diaries of his wife, Jennie Wark Morrison, which are filled with insights and observations on what it was like for ex-patriot women to live in Peking, an environment so different to the homes they had left behind, during this time of great change. Such personal documentation provides an outstanding resource for those researching the, often silenced, voices of women in history.

Historical and Political Studies

The subject files, the Morrison Miscellanea, newspaper cuttings (including cuttings from Chinese newspapers) contain a rich reservoir of, often detailed, information for researchers on a wide range of topics relating to Chinese history of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Of particular interest is the information which unpacks international relations – especially the relations China had with Britain, the rest of Europe and with Japan – ideas and practices of imperialism, the history of trade as well as the history of specific conflicts including the Boxer Uprising and the Russo-Japanese War. The Collection also offers opportunities for those wanting to explore the end of the Qing Dynasty, Chinese politics and politicians, the many Europeans who lived in China and the impact of Christian missionaries in China.

Journalism and Media Studies

Of course a substantial quantity of the Morrison story is one that is told through journalism. The Collection captures much in this area including the work of European journalists in China during Morrison's time in the country. This material invites

researchers to explore the values held by, and the roles played by, journalists working in China. In addition such material can assist in identifying key influences as these journalists crafted, in many ways, how Western nations perceived, and subsequently engaged with, this great country of the East.

Bushwalking

One example, of particular note, of how researchers can look at the George E. Morrison Collection in new – as well as unexpected – ways is Melissa Harper’s research on bushwalking. Harper has explored Morrison’s well-known walks and woven these stories into a broader narrative of walking (see: 1999 and 2000). This, quite specialised topic sees Harper focus on Morrison’s own story while simultaneously demonstrating how this story can interact with other histories, thus producing new interpretations and new understandings of Morrison and the George E. Morrison Collection. This is just one way in which both the small and large stories within this spectacular Collection can be re-packaged and re-told through theoretical frameworks that are yet to be applied to these tales.

Creative Practice

In many ways George E. Morrison is a figure that is larger than life. Even in an extraordinary world experiencing change and conflict Morrison often stands as a giant against events and his contemporaries. Such a juxtaposition of a ‘great man’ against a backdrop of so many ‘anonymous’ people, including those who populate his photographic collection (while notable figures are named within the archive, many people appearing within these photographs have not been identified), is fantastic fodder for fiction. Renowned author Linda Jaivin has also turned to the George E. Morrison Collection for her creative works: novels set in China which include *A Most Immoral Woman* (2009). In an interview for *SL Magazine*, Jaivin explains:

I portray [George E. Morrison] fairly and empathetically. Morrison was a very complex man: intelligent, quick-witted and energetic, influential, hard-working and capable, and yet flawed as well: egotistical, arrogant, judgemental and very much a man of his age (an age of empire and colonisation). Like other men of his time — and not just of his time — he saw nothing wrong with sleeping around himself but judged women who did the same ‘bad’ or ‘immoral’.

On the other hand, he had something of a habit of falling for ‘bad’ women, which for some reason endears him to me hugely. His diaries [held in the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales] are very revealing, though sometimes he’s quite coy when it comes to detail. My favourite quote is from January 1904: “Dined alone well pleased with the company.” (2009, 36)

This, revealing, interview clearly articulates how the storytelling of Morrison, as well as the abundant people and subject matters co-located with Morrison within the George E. Morrison Collection, can be achieved through fact as well as fiction.

Conclusion

This paper has, very briefly, explored the George E. Morrison Collection held at the State Library of New South Wales. The Collection is a phenomenal repository of: manuscripts; photographs; drawings; prints; glass negatives; artworks; realia; subject files; correspondence (accompanied by notes, memoranda, news cuttings, printed material, agreements, maps, certificates and various other documents); textual material and ephemera (including invitations, invoices, visiting cards, receipts, notebooks, tickets and menus); newspaper cuttings; and diaries. This vast set of materials offers a range of opportunities for researchers from various disciplines, from around the world looking at the power of communication, between East and West, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as well as the world during this period of change and conflict.

This paper has also, again briefly, explored power and how power, in Australian-Chinese relations, has been repositioned by subsequent key Australian figures visiting China, including former Prime Ministers Gough Whitlam and Kevin Rudd. In particular this paper has paid tribute to those researchers who, for decades, have worked tirelessly with this material to examine this unique and visually dramatic Collection. It is the aim of the authors that this paper will inspire scholars to continue investigating this Collection and take up some of the material that has been produced in the format of lectures, articles and books as well as consider how this material might be interrogated in innovative ways (that also have the potential to segue into new ways of digital researching methods) and produce scholarly output in the fields of photography, women's studies, historical and political studies, journalism and media studies as well as a specialised topics such as bushwalking, in addition to capitalising on the Collection's capacity to contribute to creative practice.

It is also hoped that this work will serve as a case study and might be utilised by library and information services professionals within institutions that hold collections which share two key characteristics with the George E. Morrison Collection: complexity and volume to further explore similar archives. Storytelling is an essential element of the practice of libraries, and the researchers who work with the holdings of these institutions, it is not sufficient to simply store these stories: we must work – across disciplines and across professions – to bring these stories to life.

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