

# **The Stones Are Speaking: An Analytical Study of the Epitaphs of Rev. Robert Morrison**

(An abstract)

**Lee Chee Kong**

Chairman

Christian Cultural Society

Hong Kong

On 1 August 1834, Rev. Robert Morrison passed away in Canton after 27 years of serving faithfully in China. As the first Protestant missionary who ever came to this ancient and “heathen” country in the early nineteenth century, Morrison’s contribution to the Chinese churches and the kingdom of God is beyond doubt. While most researchers concentrate on the studies of Morrison’s journals, correspondences, and related archives etc., few take heed of his memorial inscriptions. This paper attempts to draw the readers’ attention to this neglected area by analyzing four of Morrison’s epitaphs.

The first epitaph the author analyzes was brief in contents and antiquated in its Latin language. Recorded in *The Chinese Repository*, August 1834, it was possibly the earliest epitaph ever written in memory of Morrison. Three other epitaphs, one in English and two in Chinese, are examined in details in the rest of the paper. Attention is given particularly to the English epigraph that was engraved on the top of Morrison’s tomb in Macao. By looking into this inscription item by item, the author brings forth a concise picture of the career and accomplishment of this pioneer missionary.

Fighting his way to lay the foundation for Christ's body in an environment which was hostile to Christianity in every way, Morrison's mission was inconceivably tough. The fact that his life and labors have touched the souls of many thousands both in the East and the West is fully reflected in these inscriptions. The stones are lifeless, but the words engraved on them still live to speak today. At a time when the epigraphical study of Christianity in China is gaining increasing attention from the academic world, a complete and in-depth survey of our Christian inscriptions would be worthwhile. Morrison's epitaphs surely are a good one to start with.