

Macao Public Library of the Cultural Affairs Bureau of the Macao Special Administrative Region Government

Sir Robert Ho Tung Library — A Key Centre for the Transmission of Chinese Cultural Heritage in Southern China in the 20th Century

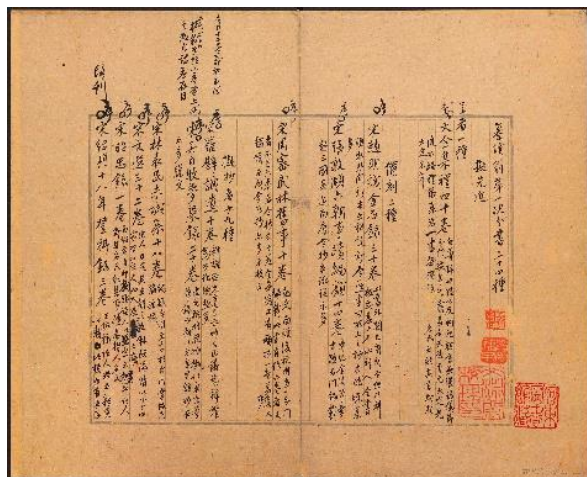
Valuing Culture and Education

Established through the initiative of Sir Robert Ho Tung, the Sir Robert Ho Tung Library was an important centre for the transmission of Chinese cultural heritage in southern China in the 20th century. In a period when Western learning was challenging established traditions, it took on the mission of widening access to education and promoting the finest traditions of Chinese culture, and has continued to disseminate Chinese civilisation ever since.

Part of the Historic Centre of Macao and a major repository of ancient books in Lingnan, the Sir Robert Ho Tung Library holds such precious works as the Manuscript of Siku Quanshu's Synopsis by Weng Fanggang, a Ming manuscript of Taiping Yulan, Chronicle of Yongzhou (Yong da ji, a Jiajing-period edition of the Ming dynasty), and the Gazetteer of Xiangshan County published during the reign of the Qing Emperor Qianlong. It continues to promote traditional Chinese learning through a wide range of activities.

As Western learning and modern currents of thought gained influence in 20th-century Macao, concerned members of society feared that Confucian teachings and the Chinese classics would fall into neglect. Recognising the urgent need to protect Chinese culture, they sought to establish a library of Chinese books that would spread knowledge, widen access to education and promote China's cultural heritage, ensuring its continuity.

Sir Robert Ho Tung (1862–1956), whose original name was Qi Dong and courtesy name Xiao Sheng, was a Hong Kong-born entrepreneur and philanthropist. Of Eurasian descent, he was raised by his mother, grew up immersed in Chinese culture and attended a traditional private school as a child. He attached great importance to education, the establishment of schools and the promotion of Chinese culture. His honours included Portugal's Order of Public Instruction and decorations awarded by China, Britain, France, Germany and Italy, among other countries.



Manuscript of Siku Quanshu's Synopsis by Weng Fanggang

The Building Through the Years

The history of the building that houses the Sir Robert Ho Tung Library dates back to before 1894. Originally the residence of Dona Carolina Antónia da Cunha, it changed hands several times before Sir Robert Ho Tung purchased it in 1918 for MOP 16,000. He named it Ho Tung House and used it as a peaceful summer retreat for himself and his family. In the 1920s, his wife, the lay Buddhist Lady Clara Ho Tung, used the villa as a base for promoting free education for girls and Buddhist learning, making a substantial contribution to public education and the dissemination of Buddhism in Macao.



Ho Tung House in the 1930s

During the Second World War, Sir Robert Ho Tung lived here and actively supported education and culture in Macao. Aware of the shortage of Chinese books available to the public at the time, he firmly believed that ‘the tide of materialism must not be allowed to engulf the virtues of spiritual civilisation; everyone must have the opportunity to study’. He therefore aspired to establish a Chinese-language library in Macao. The Portuguese historian in Macao, José Maria Braga, suggested that he donate the villa after the war for use as a library of Chinese books. Sir Robert died in Hong Kong on 26 April 1956. In accordance with his will, his descendants donated the building to the Portuguese administration of Macao, together with HKD 25,000 for the purchase of Chinese books, to help establish a public library with a Chinese-language collection. The Sir Robert Ho Tung Library officially opened on 1 August 1958. Its three-storey main building has yellow walls, with white detailing on the pilasters, arch mouldings and cornices. The tall windows on the first and second floors have green frames, and the building is crowned by a red-tiled hipped roof. With its spacious forecourt and rear garden, it was then Macao’s largest Chinese-language public library and the only garden library in Hong Kong and Macao.



Notice of the official opening of the Sir Robert Ho Tung Library, issued by the Civil Administration Department of the Province of Macao on 7 July 1958

After 2000, the Cultural Affairs Bureau of the Macao SAR Government constructed a new building in the library's rear garden, which opened on 13 November 2006. The second floor of the old building was retained as the Chinese Ancient Books Chamber, preserving the interior of a traditional Chinese study. On 15 July 2005, the library was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List as part of the Historic Centre of Macao. It has become a reading space steeped in culture, combining the functions of a traditional repository of books with those of a modern library.



The Chinese Ancient Books Chamber retains the interior of a traditional Chinese study

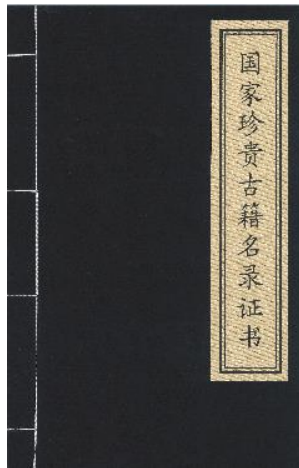


The old building of the Sir Robert Ho Tung Library today, with the Chinese Ancient Books Chamber on the second floor

Resources for Traditional Chinese Learning

In 1958, through the mediation and recommendations of José Maria Braga, the Sir Robert Ho Tung Library acquired 16 titles from the Jiaye Book Library Tower collection, including the Manuscript of Siku Quanshu's Synopsis by Weng Fanggang. This acquisition established Macao as a major centre in Lingnan for the transmission of traditional Chinese learning and the preservation of ancient books. The Jiaye collection formerly belonged to the renowned modern bibliophile Liu Chenggan. Among its holdings, the Manuscript of Siku Quanshu's Synopsis by Weng Fanggang is the most extensive surviving original record of the compilation of Siku Quanshu and its General Catalogue, making it a work of great significance for research into Siku Quanshu. In 2010, it was included in the third batch of the National Directory of Rare Ancient Works, assessed and published by China's Ministry of Culture. It was also featured in the illustrated catalogue of works from the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area listed in that national directory, published in 2022. The Macao Public Library of the Cultural Affairs Bureau commissioned the Shanghai Library to collate and study the manuscript, and collaborated with it on the publication of facsimile and typeset editions. Other holdings, including the Ming manuscript of Taiping Yulan, Chronicle of Yongzhou (a Jiajing-period edition of the Ming dynasty) and the manuscript of Major Events in the Comprehensive Mirror in

Aid of Governance, are important sources for the study of ancient Chinese literature and history.



Certificate of the inclusion of the Manuscript of Siku Quanshu's Synopsis by Weng Fanggang in the National Directory of Rare Ancient Works

Bringing Collections to Life — Keeping Books Alive and Preserving the Treasures of the Press

Through the digitisation programme for the library's rare ancient books, the 16 titles from the Jiaye collection, together with other valuable works and books relating to Macao's history, have been converted into e-books and published on an e-book reading platform for public enjoyment and scholarly research. Besides the Jiaye collection, these include the Qianlong edition of the Gazetteer of Xiangshan County; Regni Chinensis Descriptio (Volume 1 of De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas); Robert Morrison's A Dictionary of the Chinese Language; textbooks from the Republican period, such as Xin shi guo wen jiao ke shu (New-style Chinese Language Textbook); Cantonese translations such as The Pilgrim's Progress and Robinson Crusoe (Gu su li cheng); and local historical sources such as Annual Report of Kiang Wu Hospital in 1922 and the Macao Yearbook. Digitising ancient books is a systematic, long-term undertaking, rather than a one-off scanning exercise. Every stage, from assessment, scanning and restoration to checking and uploading, requires rigorous quality control. Scanned images must be checked repeatedly to correct omissions, misalignment, colour artefacts and text obscured by fragments of paper. Only when the images are complete and accurate can they be made available online to the public.



Digitisation makes the classics more accessible to the public, giving them new life



Exhibition of Precious Ancient Books

Alongside ancient and rare books, the Macao Public Library of the Cultural Affairs Bureau continues to digitise and organise newspaper and periodical materials. The Database of Periodicals Collection contains digitised images of Chinese-, Portuguese- and English-language newspapers and periodicals published in Macao in the 19th and 20th centuries. These include the Chinese-language *Xin Yuan Di*, the bilingual Chinese-Portuguese *Echo Macaense*, and the Portuguese-language *A Voz de Macau*, *Notícias de Macau* and *O Clarim*. The images are processed to improve clarity and legibility. Readers can search by newspaper title, year or date, and use the zoom function to examine details of the printed pages. These resources offer a glimpse of news events and everyday life in Macao over almost two centuries.

In 2015, to mark the 70th anniversary of the victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, the Department of Public Library Management of the Cultural Affairs Bureau and the Centre of Sino-Western Cultural Studies of the Macao Polytechnic Institute jointly launched a project to digitise Macao newspaper clippings from the war period. The project systematically located and organised material held by local libraries, newspapers and private collectors, as well as libraries, archives and academic research institutions outside Macao. These sources included microfilm, printed newspapers, old newspapers and electronic documentary resources. Approximately 18,000 pages of newspapers published in Macao during the war were digitised, documenting local social relief efforts and the patriotic spirit in which Macao supported the motherland's resistance. Of considerable historical value, they provide first-hand sources for the study of China's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression. Readers may consult the resulting Database of Macao Newspaper Clippings during the Second Sino-Japanese War free of charge at the public libraries of the Cultural Affairs Bureau.

Passing on Chinese Cultural Heritage

The Macao Public Library of the Cultural Affairs Bureau regularly organises a wide range of talks on traditional Chinese learning, thematic exhibitions and guided tours. These activities introduce ancient books to the public and deepen understanding of traditional Chinese scholarship. By presenting rare works held in its repositories in a variety of ways, the library enables the many strands of Chinese cultural heritage and traditional knowledge preserved in these books to be passed on to the next generation.



Photographs of the guided tour of the Chinese Ancient Books Chamber and poster for 'Linghai Gathering Treasures — Special Exhibition of Precious Ancient Books from Guangdong and Macau'



Collection of Valuable Electronic Rare Books



Database of Periodicals Collection



Macao Public Library