# MORGAN, FRANK ARTHUR, 'Mandarin Morgan' (1844 - 1907), Commissioner of Chinese Imperial Customs

**Name:** Frank Arthur Morgan
**Date of birth:** 1844
**Date of death:** 1907
**Spouse:** Winifred Dorothy Morgan (née Morgan)
**Partner:** Ah Soo
**Child:** Winifred Gordon Morgan
**Child:** Helen Morgan
**Child:** Frank Stanley Morgan
**Child:** Sybil Morgan
**Child:** Robert Morgan
**Parent:** Caroline Morgan (née James)
**Parent:** Charles Morgan
**Gender:** Male
**Area of activity:** Business and Industry
**Author:** Prys Morgan

Frank Arthur Morgan was born on 24 February 1844 at Cae Forgan, Llanrhidian, Gower, the third son of Charles Morgan (1796-1857), barrister of Lincoln's Inn, farmer and landowner, and his wife Caroline, daughter of Rev. John James (1772-1850) and his first wife, Jane Gammon, of Penmaen. The Morgan family were successful London barristers, with estates in Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, as well as in Abercothi (near Carmarthen) and in Gower.

Morgan was educated at Sherborne School by Dr Harper (later Principal of Jesus College, Oxford), and was made familiar with the career opportunities of China through his elder brother Charles Edward Morgan (1836-1911), an officer of the 67th Regiment who fought in the second Opium War, taking part in the sack of the Old Summer Palace at Beijing in 1860. Frank went to China in May 1864, enrolling as a fourth class clerk in the Chinese Imperial Customs Service, learning Chinese languages chiefly in Shanghai. By 1876 he was in charge of the port of Zhenjiang on the Yangtze near Nanjing, then was promoted to run the port of Taikou on the island of Taiwan, and by 1880 was a deputy commissioner in Beijing itself, one of his duties being to care for General Gordon 'Chinese Gordon' (1833-1885), whom he deeply admired. After service at Yichang on the Yangtze he returned to Beijing as acting audit secretary. He returned to Gower in 1885 on long leave in order to rebuild Herbert's Lodge, Bishopston, Gower, a property he had inherited from his uncle Henry John Morgan (1799-1859). He rented Herbert's Lodge to the Pre-Raphaelite landscape painter John Brett and his family for some months. In March 1887 he was sent to open up the port of Kowloon and lived in Hong Kong for three years, working there, it was said, 'with distinction', then was sent to the port of Zhouhai from 1890 to 1891, returning home in 1892.

Although he had formed a secret relationship for many years with his Eurasian companion, Ah Soo, and had two children by her, Robert and Sybil Morgan, when eventually his family in Wales found out, he was forced to bow to family pressure to marry (in 1892) Winifred Dorothy Morgan (1873-1950) the daughter of his cousin Stanley Morgan of Llandysul. The married couple then sailed to China, where Morgan was appointed from 1892 to 1893 to administer the Korean cities of Jenchuan and Seoul, helping to negotiate the difficult transfer of Korea from China's sphere of influence to that of the rising empire of Japan. His son, Frank Stanley Morgan (1893-1992) was born in Seoul in 1893. He was then put in charge of the port of Jiujiang on the Yangtze, where two daughters were born in 1895 and 1897, and was later in the 1890s at the southern port of Swatou. In 1900 he found himself besieged in Beijing by the Boxer Rebellion, and the family were sent home to Gower to avoid possible massacre. From 1901 to 1905 he served at Guangzhou (Canton), Shantou and in November 1903 at Suzhou. By 1902 his marriage had broken down, and during 1903 he obtained a divorce caused by his wife's adultery. She emigrated to Vancouver, marrying a distant cousin, Gordon Hanson.

Morgan retired from the Chinese service in May 1905 with the Chinese civil rank of the fourth and the second class and with the honours of the Order of the Double Dragon, third division (first class), and so King Edward VII then granted Morgan the rank and precedence of a knighthood. He retired to Herbert's Lodge, where he was cared for by his lifelong servant Ma Jing Dong, but his health rapidly declined, and he died at a London clinic in Queen Anne Street, Cavendish Square, on 11 February, 1907, and was buried on the north side of St Teilo's churchyard at Bishopston. His will had been made in 1903, and probate was granted on 23 April 1907. The total value of his estate was £3525, and three thousand pounds were put in trust for Ah Soo's children Robert and Sybil Morgan. His trustees destroyed the intimate diaries of his life in China, as being too scandalous to be read by his children.

Morgan was a short stocky bearded man, with a broad culture and delight in literature, poetry and verse, a gregarious man of the world, a lavish host, a patron of the turf at the races at Hong Kong, and would sail the coasts of China in his private yacht 'The Kiddie' painted in his family livery of chocolate brown and pale blue. The Inspector-General of the service, Sir Robert Hart, had a high regard for Morgan's 'common-sense and amiability'. When challenged by members of his family on the morality of the Chinese opium trade, which he administered for some forty years, his defence was that he was strengthening, modernizing and greatly benefiting China by opening up the country through foreign trade.

## Author

**Prys Morgan**

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