

In conversation with 施晔 (Shīyè)

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法官狄

“高羅佩 (Gāo luó pèi)”: most certainly every person who is seriously interested in Early China’s culture; its painting; erotic art; sexual and homosexual life; music, or who is interested in the (Gibbon) apes knows this name. 高羅佩 (1910-1967), in the Netherlands better known as Robert van Gulik, was highly educated in different aspects of Asian culture and was able to write extensive works about many of these aspects. However, he is probably best known for his Chinese crime novels, the “Judge Dee”-series. Many of the educated Chinese have read at least one novel of the 16-part series in which he tried to bring new life into the Chinese detective genre.

施晔 (Shīyè), a researcher from Shanghai Normal University, came especially to Holland for the Asian Library’s special collection about Robert van Gulik in order to gather as much information as possible before she has to return back to China. She only has six months; therefore, she spends almost all of her daytime sitting and reading in the Asian Library. In this article, we provide a short overview of her research up until now.

Shīyè prepared her research of “Gāo luó pèi yǔ zhōngguó wénhuà” (Robert van Gulik and Chinese Culture) for almost two years before she came to Holland on August 19. Now, after two months of tight-scheduled days she has most accurately read many materials provided in the Asian Library. Shīyè came to Holland not only for the Asian Library’s special collection about Van Gulik, but she might also have hoped to get in contact with Robert van Gulik’s son, William. She managed to do this with the help of a new friend, Peter de Hoog. William provided her with exclusive photos, gave her some books, and was willing to give interviews. They have met at least three times up until now. Another source person is the creator of the website www.rechtertie.nl, Marco Huysmans. Finally, with one of the two Chongqing colleagues who have both written Van Gulik’s biography she has an interview in November. This colleague called H. de Vries, is in her eighties.

After her return to China, she will start writing her own book on Van Gulik. The book will be divided into six parts:

1. 高羅佩與中國琴文化
Robert van Gulik and the Qin

2. 高羅佩和中國書畫及硯文化
Robert van Gulik and Chinese painting, calligraphy and ink stone
3. 高羅佩與中國性文化
Robert van Gulik and China's sexual culture
4. 高羅佩與中國猿文化
Robert van Gulik and China’s gibbon culture
5. 高羅佩與狄公案小說
Robert van Gulik and the Dee Goong An novel
6. 高羅佩收藏之珍稀小說版本考
Research on several rare editions from Robert van Gulik’s collection

In april 2010 kwam er een aanmelding binnen voor deze nieuwsbrief van een professor Shi uit Shanghai, China. Ik was natuurlijk zeer vereerd en schreef een mailtje om hem welkom te heten en me te excuseren voor het feit dat de nieuwsbrief meestal in het Nederlands is. Er ontstond een mailwisseling waaruit al snel bleek dat het geen “hem” maar een “haar” was en dat Shīyè alias Sunny (haar Westerse naam) zich bezig hield met wetenschappelijk onderzoek naar Robert van Gulik en zijn relatie met de Chinese cultuur. *En passant* hielp ze me ook met enkele aankopen op een Chinese website, maar daarover meer in een volgende nieuwsbrief.

Korte tijd later werd het duidelijk dat Sunny een beurs zou krijgen om voor haar onderzoek een half jaar in Nederland aan de Universiteit Leiden door te brengen. Van augustus 2011 tot februari 2012 was ze vrijwel dagelijks te vinden in het Sinologisch instituut en in de Robert van Gulik-kamer waar ze bezig was met het bestuderen van de vele zeldzame boeken in zijn verzameling.

De Studievereniging Sinologie (SVS) publiceerde in haar *Krant met Karakter* een interview met Sunny dat ik voor deze nieuwsbrief integraal heb mogen overnemen. Er zijn alleen enkele kleine correcties aangebracht.

Ik bedank de SVS en speciaal Commissaris Communicatie Carin van Ruijven hartelijk voor hun medewerking.

高羅佩與琴

Van Gulik has written several books related to the Qin. He even had two Guqin, which are now priceless. The Qin is a highly elegant Chinese instrument and is described as a fretless Chinese zither with seven strings. According to a website, the body of the qin was of a length that represented the 365 days of the year (3 chi [a chi is a Chinese foot], 6 cun [a cun is a Chinese inch, one-tenth of a chi], and 5 fen [a fen is one-tenth of a Chinese inch]).

高羅佩和中國書畫硯文化

Van Gulik is also the translator of some books regarding Chinese calligraphy, painting and ink stone, for example a book by the Song dynasty calligrapher 米芾 (Mǐ fèi): *Yàn de lìshǐ* (a history about ink stone). Another very thick book is his canon of appreciating painting and calligraphy: *Shūhuà jiànshāng huì biān*.

高羅佩與中國的性文化

He wrote two books related to the sexual history of China: *Mì Xì Tú Kǎo* (erotic color prints of the Ming period) and *Zhōngguó gǔdài fāng nèi Kǎo* (Sexual life of Ancient Chinese). Sexual topics are a taboo in China. Research on ancient Chinese sexual culture was therefore little. Western people misinterpreted it completely and considered Chinese sexual culture as being shallow and dirty. Robert van Gulik's works introduced them to the detailed ancient Chinese sexual culture.

高羅佩與中國的猿文化

There are many ancient Chinese poetry, prose and articles describing the gibbon. Shīyè emphasizes that “猿和猴子不一樣”: Ancient Chinese scholars appreciated gibbons (猿): they looked upon the gibbon as a sort of gentleman, whereas the monkey (猴子) is considered as being nothing more than a very noisy and greedy animal. Robert van Gulik was fond of the gibbons: he even raised several gibbons and had their voices recorded. His academic book *The Gibbon in China* is still a standard work in this field.

高羅佩與狄公案小說

According to Shīyè, many Chinese have read his novels about Judge Dee, partly because of the education level in China: his novels accessibly deal with aspects of Chinese history and culture. Judge Dee, the main character of the novel *Dee Goong An*, was based on the judge/official and detective Di Renjie, who lived in the 7th century (during the Tang Dynasty). The classic 18th century version of *Dee Goong An*, with the name *The Celebrated Cases of Judge Dee* was first translated into English by Robert van Gulik. This became a success and Van Gulik decided to continue his writing and to create his own original judge Dee stories.

There are many interesting differences between the traditional 18th century version of



the classic 18th century novel and the version written by Van Gulik. He mixed styles of Western detective novels into traditional Chinese stories with an eye to modern Western readers.

In conclusion, to quote the website iias: “The Dutch sinologist, Robert Hans van Gulik (...), was once voted as being among the 100 foreigners who had significantly influenced Chinese culture in the 20th century.”

We would like to thank Shīyè for her time.

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