

Hot Springs of Odawara? Really?

Marco Huysmans

法官狄

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In the past, when reading the essay *The Hot Springs of Odawara*, I was perfectly convinced of at least two things. Firstly, that there were hot springs in the Japanese town of Odawara. Secondly, that Robert van Gulik had spent a couple of nights there with Kachan on their New Year's holiday trip in 1935–6. But now I'm not so sure any more. To quote the famous Gershwin-song: I think "it ain't necessarily so."

So what happened? Well, last week I received a letter from Leentje de Vries, co-author of the biography *Een man van drie levens* (*A man of three lives*). I had sent her a copy of my booklet and was eagerly awaiting her reaction. I needn't have worried: she thought it "mooi en professioneel verzorgd", that is "beautiful and well-designed". But she added something that came as quite a shock to me.

Dichtung und Wahrheit

Leentje went on to say that in her opinion *Odawara* was a beautiful story, a mixture of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, of Fiction and Truth. She claimed that there are no hot springs at all in Odawara, and that Robert van Gulik hadn't stayed in Odawara itself but only in neighbouring towns. She added her own transcription of a number of entries in Van Gulik's diaries as proof.

So let's examine the evidence. For the sake of scientific completeness, I'll first give the entries in the original Dutch (as recorded by Van Gulik) and then my translation and notes.

31 (Dinsdag) December 1935

3.10 van Tokyo station naar Yoshina in Izu. Trein via Odawara en Atami, in Mishima op tram overgestapt. 6 uur in Mishima aangekomen. Diner en bad. 's Avonds om 12 uur Nieuwjaarsklokken gehoord.

31 (Tuesday) December 1935

3.10PM from Tokyo station to Yoshina in Izu. Train via Odawara and Atami, in Mishima transferred to tram. 6PM arrived in Mishima. Dinner and bath. At midnight heard the New Year bells.

Note that Yoshina is misspelled Yoshino in the biography *Een man van drie levens* (page 53). On the maps you can trace the route Van Gulik took. He arrived from Tokyo in Odawara (upper right) and traveled on south to Atami. Then he went westward to Mishima before going south again, through Izu and on to Yoshina which you find on the second, more detailed map in the lower left corner.



Apparently, Van Gulik used Odawara in precisely the way that is suggested by Wikipedia and other sources: as a gateway to the Izu Peninsula, a starting point for an excursion into *onsen* (hot spring) territory. According to the same sources, Odawara itself indeed has no hot springs at all.

1 (Woensdag) Januari 1936

In de omtrek van Yoshina 吉奈 gewandeld in het bosch, en kleine Nichiren tempel gezien. 's Ochtends 9 uur telegram aan den gezant verzonden wegens verhindering receptie.

1 (Wednesday) January 1936

Walked in the woods around Yoshina 吉奈, and saw small Nichiren temple. In the morning at 9AM sent telegram to the minister to report that I would be unable to attend the reception.

Nichiren (日蓮) is one of the founders of Buddhism in Japan.

2 (Donderdag) Januari 1936

10 uur met de auto naar Shuzenji. In tempel priester Mokurai ontmoet. Met hem naar Arae-inn, met eigenaar Aibara gegeten en spreuken geschreven. Met Mokurai naar abt Oku, waar Yoshisumi met vrouw en zoon ontmoet. Om 6 uur naar Yoshina terug.

2 (Thursday) January 1936

10AM by car to Shuzenji. In temple met priest Mokurai. With him to Arae-inn, had a meal and wrote sayings with owner Aibara. With Mokurai to abbot Oku, where I met Yoshisumi with wife and son. At 6pm returned to Yoshina.

Shuzenji (修善寺) is a small village about ten kilometres north of Yoshina, just off the road to Mishima:

Shuzenji is located in an inland region of Izu Peninsula and is noted for its numerous *onsen* hot spring resorts. The area is also noted for its production of *wasabi* and *shiitake*. (source: Wikipedia)

The next day they travel up north in the direction of Odawara:

3 (Vrijdag) Januari 1936

Met auto van Yoshina naar Yumoto, Sumiyoshi hotel, via Mishima, waar hertenpark en Shinto-feest gezien. 2 uur lunch in Yumoto. Daarna de Shōganji 正眼寺 bezocht, met relieken der Soga-broeders. Vervolgens souvenirs gekocht.

3 (Friday) January 1936

By car from Yoshina to Yumoto, Sumiyoshi hotel, via Mishima, where saw deer park and Shinto-festival. 14PM lunch in Yumoto. Afterwards visited the Shōganji 正眼寺, with relics of the Soga-brothers. After that bought souvenirs.



Yumoto (湯本) is a tiny village 6 km south-west of Odawara. I can't find any mention of there being hot springs in Yumoto, they all seem to be more to the south.

The name of the temple is commonly written *Shōgen-ji* nowadays. The above photograph is taken from rurubu.com.

Soga Monogatari (曾我物語, *The Tale of the Soga Brothers*) is an ancient Japanese story about two sons who avenge their father's murder by killing his murderer. One of the brothers dies during the fight, the other one is eventually formally executed. The story has been used in numerous books and plays.

The buying of souvenirs is mentioned in the essay:

We tarry only at a small souvenir shop, for you insist on buying a few local specialties to take back with us to Tokyo.

This is just after the central event of the essay, the visit to the ancient battlefield. However, there's no mention of that in the diary entry.

4 (Zaterdag) Januari 1936

's Ochtends wandeling naar de waterval, en door het dorp. Lunch en bad. Half vier grote wandeling door de bergen.

4 (Saturday) January 1936

In the morning walk to the waterfall, and through the village. Lunch and bath. 15.30PM long walk through the mountains.

5 (Zondag) Januari 1936

11.55 uit Odawara naar Tokyo vertrokken. 1/2 lunch in Café Parisien. Thuis verkleed, om 4 uur thee gedronken bij de Mulders. 's Avonds thuis gewerkt.

5 (Sunday) January 1936

11.55AM left Odawara for Tokyo. 1.30PM lunch in Café Parisien. Changed at home, at 4PM had tea at the Mulder's. In the evening worked at home.

So Van Gulik never actually stayed the night in Odawara, only in the neighbouring village of Yumoto. Which doesn't have any hot springs. And the town he stayed in that did have hot springs isn't anywhere near Odawara. So there you are.

Original

Having come to this conclusion I returned to the biography *Een man van drie levens* to re-examine the part about Kachan and the trip to Odawara that precedes the diary entries. On page 50–52 there's an extensive quote from the autobiographical notes Van Gulik wrote in 1964. Since Van Gulik wrote those notes in English, the biography contains a translation in Dutch, not the original notes. Which set me thinking: why not ask Leentje if she would let me have a copy of the original notes? Perhaps something was lost in translation, and anyway it would be nice to read the actual text as Van Gulik wrote it.

So I wrote a letter to Leentje, and a few days later I received a number of corrections of the draft for this newsletter I had sent along and a photocopy of the relevant part of the autobiographical notes. I don't think this has ever been published before, so I'm very proud to present the following excerpt exactly as Van Gulik wrote it, with only a few extra spaces added for readability.

From the autobiographical notes

"Thereafter I met OKAYA Katsu-yo (shortened to Kachan), and she stayed with me all through my first seven years in Japan. Having finished the elementary school only, Kachan had little knowledge; but she possessed all the intuitive wisdom the Orient has bestowed throughout the centuries on its women. She knew only Japanese, and beyond a faint curiosity had no interest in anything western, but she had the traditional old Japanese respect for things Chinese (this respect lingered on among the Japanese in general, despite the vicious anti-Chinese government campaign before and during the Pacific War, and its importance should not be underrated today — 1964). A devout believer in Shintō and the Pure Land School of Buddhism, she was Japanese through and through, and possessed all the sterling qualities of Japanese womanhood, foremost among them loyalty, modesty and thriftiness. Though barely twenty when she came to my house, she was wise in the ways of Japanese life, treated Fuku-san with deference, and the old woman grew very fond of her. Together they bought a few simple but tasteful things that made my bungalow more comfortable, and thus there was established a pattern of home-life in which I was very happy; all through those seven years, I can't remember a single quarrel, or even a hard word.

Through Kachan I obtained an insight into the subtle, unwritten rules that traditionally govern the complicated Japanese social pattern, and also into the Japanese way of life. She told me, for instance, that in order to really enjoy occasional stays in completely Japanese surroundings, one has to wear Japanese dress. I said I didn't dream of making myself ridiculous, for I had often noticed the contemptuous



amusement with which the Japanese look at tourists and other foreigners who put on a kimono. But she bought me a complete outfit, then patiently taught me the intricate pattern of behaviour that goes with Japanese dress: how to walk, how to sit, what attitudes and gestures to adopt, etc. Thereafter I found indeed that the Japanese didn't give me a second look when occasionally I adopted Japanese dress on trips up country or downtown. I also learned from her that the greatest difficulty in speaking correct Japanese does not lie in idiom or grammar, but in choosing the style of speaking appropriate for each social contact and each separate occasion. Kachan had a passion for Japanese historical films and for the classical Japanese stage, and there we went at least once every week. Apart from that, she never asked me for anything. New kimono I had practically to force on her, it was only after repeated urging that she agreed to my engaging a teacher for her in flower-arrangement; she insisted on wearing, during daytime, inside and outside the house a white maid's apron, and dressed up only when we went out together, or at night when I was working in my ever-expanding library and she sitting in her corner doing needle work or reading a novel. I was profoundly shocked when soon after she had come to the house she defined her position, with the utmost calm and using the traditional Sino-Japanese term, as that of "the maidservant who enjoys the master's favours".

However, I had to admit that she was right — at least according to the standards of the Far East, and after all it was there we were living. In the nearly seven years she lived with me

there were other Japanese and also Chinese women, but she always retained her position of “first lady” — nei-jên “she who rules the within”.

Every westerner arriving in the orient has of course to adjust himself, but — contrary to what one would expect — this process is more difficult for the orientalist than for the non-expert; for whereas the latter has to digest only one world, i.e. the new one he is confronted with in the east, the former has to assimilate this new world with the mental picture he had formed of it during his previous years or study. In my case this period of assimilation and co-ordination of theory and practice lasted nearly six months, then suddenly ended in the brief space of a few days. Through a conjunction of circumstances I can not only fix the exact date, but also submit a few snapshots then taken. During those few days Japan — and implicitly China — suddenly ceased to be for me an object of study and observation, it was as if, while observing a remote scene through a strong telescope, I suddenly found myself as if by magic transplanted into the very midst of that scene. It all happened during the New Year’s holidays 1935–36, when I had taken Kachan for a trip up country, first to a seaside village, then to the hot spring resort of Odawara. Back in Tokyo I wrote my experience down, and I append a rough English translation to this record. It meant for me the second turning point in my life; various problems I had been puzzling about for a long time became crystal-clear all at once, and I arrived at what might be called a personal equation with the orient. Thereafter I saw China and Japan so to speak from within, and could read Chinese and Japanese texts without mentally translating them. Did auto-suggestion play a role then? I rather think it was one of those “sudden revelations” mentioned in Zen.”

Memory

One should keep in mind that Van Gulik wrote these notes in 1964, almost 30 years after his trip with Kachan. He states that they first went to “a seaside village”. I suppose it might be a matter of interpretation, but Yoshina is at least 10 kilometres from the nearest seaside, situated as it is in the centre of the Izu Peninsula. He also repeats the statement that they went to

“the hot spring resort of Odawara”, when in reality they went to a village a fair distance from Odawara where no hot springs are to be found at all. I think it is safe to say that he wrote the notes solely relying on his memory and without consulting his diaries of the time.

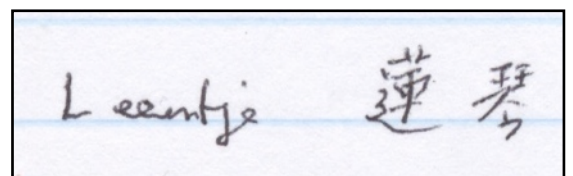
Another mystery

But there’s another remark in the original notes that strikes me as odd. It’s this: “Back in Tokyo I wrote my experience down, and I append a rough English translation to this record.” First of all, this remark was left out of the Dutch translation in the biography, so it was quite a surprise. Moreover, it seems to add yet another mystery to this case. Until now, I had been convinced that the original *Odawara* had been written in English and that Van Gulik translated it in Dutch for publication in *Elsevier’s*. His remark in the notes seems to suggest that it was written in Dutch first and translated into English afterwards. Or is this another lapse of memory?

The reason I was convinced it was originally written in English is the typescript of which a part is reproduced at the bottom of this page. Obviously, this can’t be the original typescript since it already mentions the Dutch version that was published in 1937 (and not in 1936 as is erroneously stated in this typescript). Furthermore, it states that the Dutch version was “abbreviated”. One would therefore assume a more detailed English version existed from which the Dutch version was derived.

On the other hand, perhaps that assumption is a bit rash. Could it be that the original was indeed written in Dutch, that an abbreviated version was then produced for publication in *Elsevier’s*, and that the English translation was only done (much) later?

Frankly, I don’t know. I plan on doing some more research to try and find out, and of course the results will in due course be presented in this newsletter.



THE HOT SPRINGS OF ODAWARA by Dr. R. H. van Gulik
(Dutch abbreviated text published in "Elseviers Geillustreerd Maandschrift", 1936, under the pseudonym Shugi-inshi)

A grey mist has spread again over the sea this late-summer afternoon, and the pinetrees, gnarled and misshapen through continuous exposure to the salty breeze have become useless watchmen along the deserted coast. The wind, fresh and invigorating when we arrived here two days ago, now is gradually being superseded by oppressive vapours that leave a brackish taste on our lips and a dank smell in our clothes.

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