

Traces, Places & Faces

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Last week, all eyes in the Van Gulik community were turned to Chongqing. Two major events had been planned to coincide: the official opening of the Dutch Consulate in Chongqing, and the official opening of a special exhibition dedicated to Robert van Gulik in the famous Three Gorges Museum.

The official title of the exhibition is *Recollection of Old Stories in Chongqing: Exhibition of the Private Collections of Robert Hans van Gulik (Gao Luopei)*. The Van Gulik Estate has donated a number of his personal belongings to the museum. The family was represented at the opening by Pauline and Thomas van Gulik.



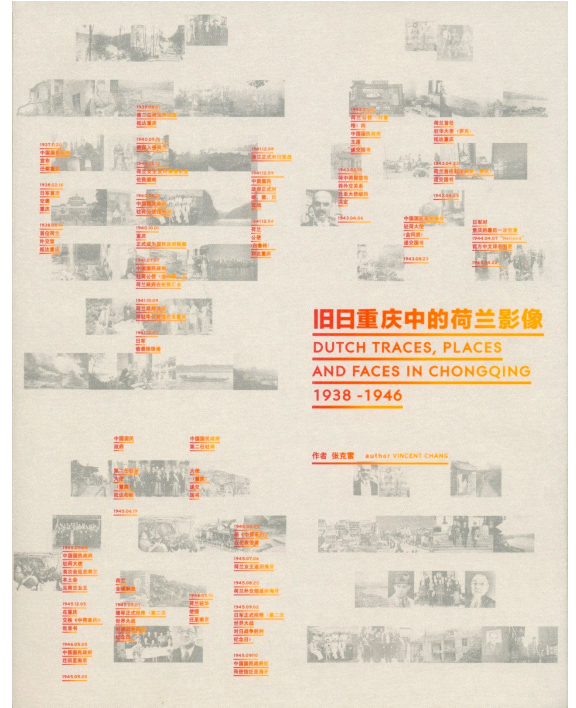
Hefty tome

To mark the opening of the special exhibition, an international conference was staged entitled *Robert van Gulik's Life in Chongqing*. It was hosted by my dear friend Prof. Shi who delivered the keynote speech *The Robert van Gulik Phenomenon in European Sinology History* and chaired the academic presentation and discussion of the conference. It will be the subject of another newsletter quite soon, I hope.

In this newsletter however, I will concentrate on the other event, the official opening of the Dutch Consulate. After her return from Chongqing, Pauline van Gulik kindly sent me a copy of a hefty tome called *Dutch Traces, Places and Faces in Chongqing 1938-1946*. The colophon reads:

This book was commissioned by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Beijing on the occasion of the celebration of 40 years of diplomatic relations at the ambassadorial level between The Netherlands and the People's Republic of China and the establishment of a Netherlands consulate-general in Chongqing in 2013.

The author, Vincent Chang, is a Dutch lawyer and consultant. He first visited



Chongqing in 2008 in search of family roots. He later moved to Chongqing to work and live there, using this occasion for further research of wartime diplomatic history.

The book is beautifully designed, with an abundance of interesting photographs from the archives of the Van Gulik Estate, former Dutch Ambassador to China Roland van den Berg, and many others.

Two fragments

I would like to present two excerpts from this interesting work. The first one is concerned with Van Gulik's marriage to Shui Shih-fang. It is accompanied by a picture of the newspaper advertisement announcing the marriage which I can't remember having seen before. The title of the fragment is *Two weddings and a baby*. The second wedding is that between Major Dorone van den Brandeler (Dutch military attaché) and Mademoiselle Jacqueline Meyrier (daughter of the French Ambassador); the baby is Willem van Gulik.

In December 1943, the international community in Chongqing witnessed a joyous Sino-Dutch personal union when Dutch embassy secretary Robert van Gulik married Shui Shih-fang, a granddaughter of one of the *Four Great Officials* of the Qing-dynasty. The wedding ceremony took place on 18 December in the Grace Community Church at the grounds of the Qiuqing Middle School, not far from the couple's new mari-

两个婚礼和一个婴儿 TWO WEDDINGS AND A BABY



tal home where that same night a festive banquet was held.

The newlyweds spent a brief honeymoon in the famous southern hot springs just outside Chongqing, in beautiful lush environments which today still offer a pleasant and quiet repose from the hustle and bustle of city life. In September 1944, their first son was born in the renowned Chongqing Kuanren Hospital at Daijia Xiang, situated at the grounds where its successor, the Second Affiliated Hospital of Chongqing Medical University, stands today.

Water lilies restore disturbed harmony

The second fragment is one that has nothing to do with Van Gulik but which just caught my eye. It's about the way the name of my country is written in Chinese; it's also about the way words that are in themselves innocent and harmless may acquire sinister connotations in times of turmoil.

In December 1943, the Dutch embassy in Chongqing sent a three-page memorandum to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, seeking formal approval for a change of the official transcription in Chinese of the name *Holland*, which at the time was transcribed in official documents as 和兰 (*Helan*).

The main reason behind this somewhat remarkable request was that the first character (和) in this compound, pronounced in Mandarin as *He* and meaning *harmony*, could give rise to confusion as the Japanese used the same character in certain expressions to designate their own country. Such potential confusion was considered the more undesirable, since it involved Japan, a country with which both the Netherlands and China were at war.

At the time, common Chinese usage employed another Chinese character (荷) with the same pronunciation to transcribe the *He* of *Holland*. Both in Chinese literature and in the Chinese press this character, meaning *water lily* or *lotus*, was used exclusively to refer to *Holland*, and it was the only variant listed as such in important Chinese standard dictionaries. In their memorandum, the Dutch diplomats proposed to formalize this popular transcription — which had already appeared in diplomatic documents during the early Qing dynasty — thus replacing the *harmony* character by the *water lily* one in official usage.

In March 1944, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs replied that the Chinese government welcomed the Dutch proposal and indicated that they had already instructed other government departments to implement the formal change. On 29 April 1944, the Dutch embassy in Chongqing issued a circular to all relevant departments and other embassies notifying them of the change. Thus, Chongqing became the birthplace of the official Chinese name for *Holland* in use today.



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