Imagining China in Robert van Gulik's Judge Dee Illustrations: Cultural Hybridity and Visual Construction

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Dutch diplomat and Sinologist Robert van Gulik (1910–1967) wrote and illustrated a series of *Judge Dee* detective novels in the mid-twentieth century, popularizing traditional Chinese culture among Western audiences. His illustrations, modeled after Ming dynasty (1368–1644) woodblock prints, use clean and simple lines to depict settings and figures rich in Chinese stylistic elements. Through a close analysis of his illustrations, this study shows how van Gulik blended traditional Chinese aesthetics with Western visual and narrative conventions, creating a hybrid artistic style that bridged cultural boundaries. It further explores how he constructed an idealized vision of China, portraying Judge Dee as a fusion of Confucian scholar-official virtues and Western detective traits, and framing female figures—particularly through the frequent depiction of nude women. This study reveals how van Gulik adapted Chinese visual traditions, expressed his understanding of Chinese culture, and created illustrations that resonated with both Western and Chinese audiences within the broader context of mid-twentieth-century cross-cultural exchange.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"I wanted to keep my illustrations in genuine old Chinese styles." This is a statement written in 1966 by the Dutch diplomat and Sinologist Robert van Gulik (Chinese name Gao Luopei 高罗佩, 1910–1967) in his notes, referring to the illustrations he personally created for his Judge Dee stories.[1] Between 1948 and 1967, van Gulik wrote this series of detective novels in English, featuring the Tang Dynasty (618–907) official Di Renjie 狄仁杰 (630–704) as the protagonist. In Tang Dynasty history, Di Renjie was a distinguished politician who rose to the position of Chancellor twice. In van Gulik's novels, he is transformed into Judge Dee, a semifictional figure who blends the roles of detective and county magistrate, modeled on traditional Chinese *gong'an* (magistrate-case) fiction, solving intricate crimes with the help of his loyal assistants. Each of Judge Dee's novels contained between six and twenty illustrations (Table 1), most of which were drawn by van Gulik himself and marked with his signature "R&H" (Fig. 1), with only one illustration created by a friend, and minor modifications appearing in different editions.[2] Stylistically, these illustrations resemble woodblock prints from the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), depicting the refined, long-bearded Judge Dee, his astute and capable assistants, and numerous sensuous nude female figures. Through these novels, van Gulik sought to introduce traditional Chinese culture to Western readers while simultaneously demonstrating to Chinese and Japanese audiences that Chinese classical *gong'an* novels, although often forgotten, still held significant value. Therefore, in 1953, he translated *The*

[1] Robert Hans van Gulik, notes for *The Chinese Maze Murders* in "Remarks on my Judge Dee Novels," 1, Box 2, Robert Hans van Gulik Collection #358, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University.

[2] The illustration of a flower boat at the beginning of *The Chinese Lake Murders* was drawn by Hilary Waddington. Robert Hans van Gulik, "preface" in *The Chinese Lake Murders* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), viii.

Chinese Maze Murders into classical Chinese and published it in Singapore.[3] After the publication of the Judge Dee series, the novels were well received in Europe and the United States and were later reintroduced to China in the 1980s through new Chinese translations, where they also garnered positive acclaim. Van Gulik's novels blend the conventions of Western detective fiction with elements of traditional Chinese literature. Similarly, his illustrations attempt to merge Chinese and Western artistic traditions, resonating with the Chinese aesthetic preferences while remaining accessible and captivating for Western viewers.

This cross-cultural aspect of van Gulik's work has become an important point in comparative literature studies for both Chinese and Western researchers. Shi Ye and Wei Yan explore the transformations that occur in the Judge Dee stories through cross-linguistic and cross-cultural translation and rewriting, as well as the cultural meanings embedded in these processes.4 Dan F. Wright, Sabrina Hao, and J. K. Van Dover, respectively, have examined van Gulik's works through the theoretical frameworks of Orientalism, cultural hybridity, and reader reception.5 In Orientalism (1978), Edward Said defines the "Orient" not as a geographical or cultural reality, but as a constructed entity shaped through literary and artistic, discourses in opposition to the "West." Within this binary framework, the East is portrayed as mysterious,

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[3] Robert Hans van Gulik, *The Chinese Maze Murders: A Chinese Detective Story Suggested by Three Original Ancient Chinese Plots* (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 1997), v-vi.

[4] Shi Ye 施晔, "Kua wenhua yujing xia zhongguo gongan xiaoshuo de xichuan yu huishuo: yi helan gao luopei migong an weili " 跨文化语境下中国公案小说的西传与回溯: 以荷兰高罗佩《迷宫案为例》[The Transcultural Transmission and Reappropriation of Chinese Gong'an Fiction: A Case Study of the Dutch Author Robert van Gulik's *The Chinese Maze Murders*], *Shehui kexue* 社会科学 6 (2011): 167–176; Wei Yan 魏艳, "Lun digong an gushi zhong de zhongxi hudong" 论狄公案故事中的中西互动 [Sino-Western Interactions in the Judge Dee Stories], *Zhongguo bijiao wenxue* 中国比较文学 1 (2009): 80–92.

[5] Dan F Wright, "Chinoiserie in the Novels of Robert Hans Van Gulik," Master thesis, Wilfrid Laurier U, 2004; Sabrina Yuan Hao, "Transcending Cultural Boundaries: Robert van Gulik's Judge Dee Detective Stories," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée* 43, no. 4 (2016): 551–567; J. Kenneth van Dover, *The Judge Dee Novels of R.H. van Gulik: The Case of the Chinese Detective and the American Reader* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2015).

backward, exotic, and irrational—a cultural "other" that serves to reinforce Western superiority.[6] Following this postcolonial perspective, one significant question in the study of Judge Dee has emerged: As a Dutch author, does van Gulik offer an authentic representation of China, or does his depiction likewise constitute a colonial construction of the "other?" Dan F. Wright argues that van Gulik's detective stories are not authentic representations of China or the Chinese people but rather portray the "exotic East" superimposed on a familiar Western framework.[7] In contrast, Sabrina Hao suggests that the binary framework and Orientalist lens are insufficient to explain the complexity of van Gulik's works, which instead reflect an attempt to create a cultural hybridity that merges Chinese and Western elements.[8] However, rather than evaluating the authenticity of van Gulik's representation of Chinese culture, this study focuses on how his illustrations convey an image of Chinese culture that aligns with his own idealized vision. His perspective may be seen as an expression of Orientalism and may not necessarily be entirely objective or accurate. More significantly, it reflects van Gulik's perception and reconstruction of China within the historical context of his time. As Lydia Liu argues, a more effective way to challenge the East-West binary is to identify specific historical moments when this concept gains contextual significance and is legitimized within a particular linguistic framework.[9]

Particularly, Robert van Gulik's life and career were deeply intertwined with Chinese culture, and his engagement with China occurred during a period of significant political transformation, from the Republic of China (1912–1949) to the establishment of the People's

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[6] Edward W Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, a division of Random House, 2003).

[7] Wright, "Chinoiserie in the Novels of Robert Hans Van Gulik," 23–24.

[8] Hao, "Transcending Cultural Boundaries: Robert van Gulik's Judge Dee Detective Stories," 563–564.

[9] Lydia He Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity--China, 1900–1937* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1995), xvii-xviii.

Republic (1949- present). Born in the Netherlands in 1910 and raised partly in Java during Dutch colonial rule, van Gulik was exposed early to Asian languages and cultures. His linguistic and cultural fluency was exceptional; by high school, he was already studying Chinese, Sanskrit, and Russian, and publishing essays on Chinese poetry.[10] He officially entered diplomatic service in Japan in the 1930s, a time marked by Japan's imperial expansion and the growing tensions of World War II. After temporary postings in Africa and India, he arrived in wartime Chongqing in 1943 as First Secretary to the Dutch Legation, at the height of the Second Sino-Japanese War. During this time, he married Shui Shifang 水世芳 (1912–2005), a woman from a traditional scholar-official family. Despite the turbulent political environment during his time as a diplomat in China, van Gulik seldom mentioned political issues in his writings. Barkman argues that, rather than engaging with politics, van Gulik devoted much of his energy to immersing himself in Chinese literary and artistic circles.[11] He was deeply passionate about classical Chinese culture and consciously sought to model himself after the traditional Chinese scholar-official; he employed a brush to write in Chinese when corresponding with contemporary Chinese intellectuals (Fig. 2) and was also proficient in composing classical-style poetry and playing the guqin, a traditional Chinese musical instrument.[12]

However, the classical Chinese culture that van Gulik admired existed in a historical moment where it was increasingly seen as outdated. In 1912, following the collapse of the imperial system, Chinese intellectuals actively pursued modernization and reform by looking

[10] C. D. Barkman and H. de Vries-Van der Hoeven, *Dutch Mandarin: The Life and Work of Robert Hans van Gulik* (Bangkok, Thailand: Orchid Press, 2018), 14–20.

[11] Barkman and Van der Hoeven, *Dutch Mandarin: The Life and Work of Robert Hans van Gulik*, 102–103.

[12] Barkman and Van der Hoeven, *Dutch Mandarin: The Life and Work of Robert Hans van Gulik*, 123–128.

toward the West and the Soviet Union. At the same time, in 1913, Sax Rohmer (1883–1959) created the character of Dr. Fu Manchu (Fig. 3), a sinister portrayal of a Chinese figure that would shape Western popular imagination for the next five decades, reinforcing fears of the "Yellow Peril."13 The East and the West coexist in both opposition and convergence, with transcultural transmission continuously taking shape; a dynamic that Craig Clunas refers to as "the echo chamber," which illustrates how statements from the East and the West undergo complex, rather than unilateral, transformations when received within a different cultural context.14 When van Gulik created the Judge Dee series in the mid-20th century, the Cold War was taking shape, and the global political and cultural landscapes were profoundly influenced by ideological divisions.

Within this context, re-examining Robert van Gulik's Judge Dee novels and illustrations offers a valuable lens through which to explore the complexities of Sino-Western cultural exchange in the mid-20th century. Notably, while these illustrations constitute a significant form of visual narrative, they have not received the same level of scholarly attention as the novels themselves. Yet, these illustrations offer a rich visual archive through which to critically examine van Gulik's interpretations of Chinese culture and his engagement with gender politics. Rather than neutral representations, the images reflect his selective appropriation of traditional motifs, his idealization of a Confucian moral order, and his recurring use of eroticized female figures. This study asks: How do van Gulik's illustrations—drawing on the visual language of Ming

[13] Seshagiri Urmila, "Modernity's (Yellow) Perils: Dr. Fu-Manchu and English Race Paranoia," *Cultural Critique*, no. 62 (2006): 162–163.

[14] Craig Clunas, *Huiyin shi: 1897–1935 nian kuaguo de zhongguo hua* 回音室：1897–1935 跨国的中国画 [The Echo Chamber: Transnational Chinese Painting, 1897–1935], translated by Liang Xiao (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 2024), 327.

dynasty woodblock prints—serve as a medium through which he reinterprets and reconstructs Chinese culture, and how have these images, in turn, resonated with and shaped transcultural perceptions of China among both Western and Chinese audiences within their specific historical and cultural contexts? Not only do these questions pertain to van Gulik's cultural perspective, but also extend to broader issues of cross-cultural exchange and knowledge production.

This thesis is divided into two main chapters to examine how Robert van Gulik constructs his vision of China through both illustrations and text, analyzing the cultural significance of this constructed image within a cross-cultural context. Chapter II explores how van Gulik's illustrations visually embody cross-cultural adaptation and synthesis. By drawing inspiration from Ming dynasty woodblock prints, modifying their elements, and integrating his own artistic style, he creates a visual system that merges traditional Chinese aesthetics with Western narrative conventions. Chapter III focuses on how van Gulik constructs his idealized China through the characterization of Judge Dee, the portrayal of female figures, and his cultural conservatism.

CHAPTER II

CROSS-CULTURAL ADAPTATION IN VAN GULIK'S ILLUSTRATIONS

To align with the novel's historical setting, Robert van Gulik intentionally designed his illustrations to emulate the style of Chinese Ming dynasty woodblock prints, drawing extensively on Chinese sources as references. Piet Rombouts traces the sources of at least nine original Chinese and Japanese prints that influenced van Gulik's illustrations.[15] However, while incorporating these Chinese elements and symbols, van Gulik introduced intentional modifications, creating a hybrid style that combines both Chinese and Western characteristics. This hybridity is evident in both technique and content, shaping his artistic approach throughout his career.

Chinese Sources as a Reference

Van Gulik owned an extensive collection of woodblock prints. He stated that the primary references for the illustrations in his *Judge Dee* series were the Ming dynasty works *Lienü zhuan* 烈女传 (Biographies of Exemplary Women) and *Liexian quanzhuan* 列仙全传 (Complete Biographies of the Immortals), with the nude figures being inspired by erotic albums from the same period.[16] Both of these books contain a wealth of woodblock illustrations. In particular

[15] Piet Roombouts, *Bronnen van illustraties in de rechter Tie-romans: Judge Dee illustrations and their sources*, unpublished draft in English, provided by the author via email, June 2024. The book was privately printed in a limited edition.

[16] Robert Hans van Gulik, "Note on the Illustrations of the Judge Dee novels," 1966, Box 2, Robert Hans van Gulik Collection #358, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University. Some of van Gulik's Chinese woodblock prints collection can be seen Li Meiyan 李美燕, Gao Bai 高柏 and Lei Hanuo 雷哈诺, "Helan gao luopei zai gudai zhongguo ya wenhua fangmian de cangshu yu lunzhu" 荷兰高罗佩在古代中国雅文化方面的藏书与论著 [Robert van Gulik's Collection and Writings on the Refined Culture of Ancient China], *Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiu tongxun* 中国文哲研究通讯 18, no. 3 (2008): 145–162. His collection of erotic albums is discussed in Fan Jingzhong 范景中, "Gao Luopei de banhua micang" 高罗佩的版画秘藏 [Robert van Gulik's collection of prints], *Xin Meishu* 新美术 03 (2008): 29–32.

Lienü zhuan, in the version illustrated by Ming painter Qiu Ying 仇英, includes over 300 illustrations.[17] The text was originally authored by Liu Xiang 刘向 (77–6 BCE) during the Western Han dynasty (202 BCE- 8 CE) and documents and praises women with Confucian moral virtues. By the Ming dynasty, with the advancement of commercial printing, multiple illustrated editions of the book emerged, incorporating elements from popular novels and dramas of the time.[18] Different editions of *Lienü zhuan* feature varying layout formats, including illustrations placed above the text or full-page illustrations. In Qiu Ying's edition, also known as the *Zhibuzuzhai* edition, the illustrations span two facing pages, forming a continuous narrative scene (Fig. 4). This edition includes over 300 figures and richly detailed settings, which provided substantial reference material for Robert van Gulik's illustrations. According to Roombouts, more than 60 visual elements in the Judge Dee's illustrations were derived from *Lienü zhuan*.[19]

Van Gulik traced Chinese visual elements such as furniture, trees, figures, and other objects from his collection of Ming woodblock prints using semi-transparent paper and then incorporated them into his work.[20] The sketches of van Gulik's illustrations at Boston University Library provide further evidence of this process. His drafts contain annotations such as "traced detail," indicating that certain details were referenced (Fig. 5). Some sketches also include penciled numbers (Fig. 6), which may suggest catalog numbers of his personal woodblock

[17] Liu Xiang 刘向 and Qiu Ying 仇英, *Mingke lidai Lienü zhuan: Qiu Shizhou hui tu zhen ji* 明刻历代列女传：仇英绘图真迹 [Ming Dynasty Biographies of Exemplary Women: Authentic Paintings by Qiu Ying] (Tianjin: Tianjin Renmin Meishu Chubanshe, 2004).

[18] Katherine Carlitz, "The social uses of female virtue in late Ming editions of Lienü zhuan," *Late Imperial China* 12, no. 2 (1991): 118–124.

[19] Roombouts, *Judge Dee illustrations and their sources*.

[20] Van Gulik, "Note on the Illustrations of the Judge Dee novels."

collection. These traced details were likely modified before the final publication. For instance, in a draft for *The Chinese Nail Murders* (Fig. 7), a note next to a plant in the upper right corner states "traced from a Chinese print." However, in the final version (Fig. 8), this plant was replaced with a banana tree similar to the one in the upper left corner.

Similarly, a further reference to Chinese woodblock prints can be seen not through details but through the overall composition of the illustrations. One of the most iconic and recurring scenes in Judge Dee's stories is the interrogation of criminals (Fig. 9), which appears in every book, sometimes more than once. The composition of this typical scene often follows a diagonal layout, with the bench—a working table—positioned at an angle of about 30 degrees. Common objects on the bench include brushes and an inkstone, but a cylindrical container holding thin bamboo slips reinforces the violent nature of the county court's judicial process, when the magistrate throws out a bamboo slip, it signals the officers to carry out corporal punishment as ordered.[21] In these interrogation scenes, Judge Dee is always seated at the back of the bench, occupying the upper part of the image, symbolizing his authority in contrast to the kneeling criminals below. His assistants vary in their positions across different illustrations, sometimes standing in front of the desk, and at other times positioned behind Judge Dee. This type of scene also draws reference from *Lienü zhuan*, such as in Fig. 4, which is titled "Donghai xiaofu" 东海孝妇, depicting the story of a filial woman from the Donghai region who was wrongfully accused.[22] Compared to van Gulik's illustrations, the image in *Lienü zhuan* presents a horizontal, two-page spread composition, featuring richer environmental details and relatively softer facial

[21] In the postscript of *The Chinese Bell Murders*, van Gulik provides a detailed description of the furnishings on the courtroom desk in a county yamen. Robert Hans van Gulik, *The Chinese Bell Murders* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 283.

[22] Liu Xiang and Qiu Ying, *Ming ke li dai Lie nü zhuan: Qiu Shizhou hui tu zhen ji*, vol. 2, 28–29.

expressions. Examples of similar compositional references include scenes set in a bedroom (Fig. 10), a courtyard (Fig. 11), and a dream sequence (Fig. 12), among others.[23] Van Gulik typically used the overall layout of the original images, including the figures' postures and gestures, while making appropriate simplifications to enhance the clarity and emphasis of the narrative.

Van Gulik's extensive use of *Lienü zhuan* and other Chinese woodblock illustrations demonstrates his profound engagement with traditional Chinese visual culture. His method of tracing, adapting, and rearranging elements from these sources reveals an approach to image-making, that reflects a process of selection and modification, influenced not only by the practicalities of book illustration but also by his artistic sensibilities and cross-cultural perspectives. This transcultural aspect is also reflected in the technical approach discussed below.

Techniques and Styles

Van Gulik's choice to adopt the style of woodblock prints was likely shaped by both cultural and personal factors. Not only did this choice reflect his personal artistic preferences and deep appreciation for classical Chinese aesthetics, but it also aligned with his broader objective of presenting Chinese culture to Western audiences through a medium historically associated with book illustration in China, particularly since the Ming dynasty.

Before the invention of woodblock printing, China already had a longstanding tradition of carving and taking rubbings from stone and stele inscriptions. As early as 175 CE, texts were carved onto flat stone surfaces to standardize educational materials and reduce errors common in

[23] Hisashi Shibusawa 澁澤尚, "ロバート・ハンス・ファン・ヒューリック『ディー判事もの』の挿絵について: 高羅佩狄奇案插圖來源攷" [On Illustrations of "The Judge Dee Stories" by Robert Hans van Gulik], 福島大学人間発達文化学類論集 21 (2015): 58–66.

hand-copied manuscripts.[24] This technique of stone rubbing enabled the replication of refined calligraphy and eventually evolved into the practice of woodblock printing. The exact date of the invention of woodblock printing remains uncertain, but by the Tang dynasty, the technique was already employed to produce Buddhist scriptures and images, contributing significantly to the dissemination of Buddhism.[25] The earliest printed religious illustration found in the Dunhuang Cave is an image for the *Diamond Sutra*, dated to 868 CE.[26] By the time of the Ming dynasty, woodblock printing had flourished, reaching new levels of artistic and technical sophistication. During this period, the number of illustrations in books surged to an unprecedented level since the invention of printing, encompassing a diverse range of subjects and content, including philosophical diagrams, Buddhist and Daoist stories, illustrations for novels and dramas, encyclopedic works, and more. This blend of artistic refinement and popular appeal made the period notable.[27] For example, Wu Hung stated that the *Xixiang ji* 西厢记 (*Romance of the Western Chamber*) had as many as 60 different editions during the Ming dynasty, and 30 of them featured illustrations that were all produced between the 16th century and the early 17th century.[28] Moreover, the evolution of woodblock printing in East Asia during the Ming and Qing (1644–1912) Dynasties was also shaped by cross-cultural exchanges, as artistic techniques and

[24] David HS Chau, "Woodblock printing, an essential medium of culture inheritance in Chinese history," *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1978): 177.

[25] Guo Weiqu 郭味蕖, *Zhongguo banhua shilve* 中国版画史略 [Short history of Chinese woodblock prints] (Shanghai: Shanghai Shuhua Chubanshe, 2016), 1–4.

[26] Guo, *Zhongguo banhua shilve*, 8–10.

[27] Craig Clunas, *Pictures and Visuality in Early Modern China* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1997), 29.

[28] Wu Hung, *The Double Screen: Medium and Representation in Chinese Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 245.

stylistic influences traveled between China, Japan, and the West.[29] With the introduction of European engraving styles brought by Western missionaries, certain Chinese prints produced for the literati and imperial courts began to reflect Western artistic influences.[30] Meanwhile, due to political turmoil, some Chinese artists and writers fled to Japan, possibly bringing with them the technique of color printing. In Japan, the prints technique developed into an independent art form, with *ukiyo-e* artists recognizing its unique aesthetic qualities and fully exploring its creative potential.[31]

As a continuation of the artistic tradition from stone carvings and rubbings, traditional Chinese woodblock printing is a relief printing technique that involves carving an image onto a wooden block, typically made from fine-grained pear or jujube wood for its durability and ability to hold intricate details.[32] The raised areas of the block are inked and then pressed onto paper. Monochrome prints are created using a single block, while multicolor *douban* 饾版 prints require multiple blocks, precisely aligned for layered color application.[33] For illustrations in novels and dramas, the production process required close collaboration between literary authors, block carvers, and painters. In some cases, the carvers themselves were also painters, while in others, the carving process was based on pre-existing drawings, transforming the original artwork into a reinterpretation through engraving.[34] During the middle and late Ming Dynasty, both the

[29] T. June Li and Suzanne E Wright, *Gardens, Art and Commerce in Chinese Woodblock Prints* (San Marino, California: Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, 2016), 13.

[30] Li and Wright, *Gardens, Art and Commerce in Chinese Woodblock Prints*, 23.

[31] Rebecca Salter, *Japanese Woodblock Printing* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 9.
[32] Chau, "Woodblock printing, an essential medium of culture inheritance in chinese history," 177+185–187.

[33] Tsuen-hsuin Tsien, *Collected Writings on Chinese Culture* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2011), 129–136.

[34] Guo, *Zhongguo banhua shilüe*, 57–60.

technical refinement and artistic quality of woodblock prints reached their peak. On the one hand, renowned painters such as Qiu Ying, Tang Yin 唐寅 (1470–1524), and Chen Hongshou 陈洪绶 (1598–1652) began contributing directly to printmaking by creating designs specifically for woodblock prints, which were then carved by skilled artisans.[35] As a result, these prints exhibited greater artistic depth in both composition and figure representation, as exemplified by Chen Hongshou's illustrations for *Xixiang ji* (Fig. 13). On the other hand, regional styles of woodblock carving emerged, with artisans in different areas developing distinctive engraving techniques and characteristics. Notable centers of woodblock print production included Nanjing, Huizhou, and Wulin (modern-day Hangzhou), all located in the south China along the Yangzi River delta region, where economic and commercial prosperity provided favorable conditions for cultural and artistic production.[36]

From the material analyzed, it is evident that van Gulik had a deep interest in Ming dynasty Chinese woodblock prints. The Boston University Library holds a booklet he compiled in Dutch, titled *Chinese Houtsneden* (Chinese Woodblock Prints), in which he discusses the materials and techniques of traditional Chinese woodblock printing, as well as parts of his own print collection.[37] The cover of this booklet (Fig. 14) features a page from a Ming dynasty erotic album, *Fengliu juechang tu* 风流绝唱图 (Pictures of the Height of Sophistication), which was part of his collection. According to Fan Jingzhong's research, the carving of this image was likely done by Huang Yiming, a craftsman originally from Huizhou who later moved to

[35] Guo, *Zhongguo banhua shilve*, 177.

[36] Li and Wright, *Gardens, Art and Commerce in Chinese Woodblock Prints*, 46–58.

[37] Robert Hans van Gulik, *Chinese Houtsneden*, Box 2, Robert Hans van Gulik Collection #358, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University.

Hangzhou.[38] Therefore, this set of prints embodies the Huizhou and Wulin region's elegant and refined style, characterized by delicate and meticulously executed lines.

Van Gulik similarly emphasized the aesthetic quality of linework when using a pen to imitate the style of woodblock prints. He noted, "Since the strictly linear style of the Chinese book illustration leaves no margin for corrections by shading or other conventional devices, I had to redraw practically every plate a number of times before achieving the desired effect."[39] However, compared to traditional woodblock prints, van Gulik's technique exhibits notable differences. His lines are simpler and more uniform, which may have been intended to enhance clarity and readability or may reflect the influence of pen-and-ink drawing techniques. Although he was aware that Chinese woodblock prints do not employ shading, his line work at times still reflects the influence of pen-and-ink techniques, where lines are used to render shadows. This is unmistakably evident in Fig. 15, where the lines on the corpse lying beneath the wall visibly demonstrate this influence. Furthermore, as previously discussed, van Gulik often omitted certain details from his illustrations, a practice that helped to emphasize the narrative themes he sought to convey. This approach is also evident in his reproduction of woodblock prints for publication. In 1951, for scholarly purposes, *Erotic Color Prints of the Ming Period* was published in a limited edition of fifty numbered copies, which were distributed to museums and libraries worldwide.[40] This work included his reprinted versions of Ming dynasty erotic print albums.

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[38] Fan, "Gao Luopei de banhua micang," 31.

[39] Van Gulik, "Note on the Illustrations of the Judge Dee novels."

[40] Van Gulik believed that these erotic paintings, along with related studies on Chinese sexual life, held artistic, sociological, and medical significance. However, due to the sensitive nature of the subject matter, he stated that such works should be entrusted to qualified scholars and therefore published them in limited editions. Robert Hans van Gulik, *Erotic Colour Prints of the Ming Period: With an Essay on Chinese Sex Life from the Han to the Ch'ing Dynasty, B.C. 206-A.D. 1644* (Boston: Brill, 2003), lxiv+ lxxii.

James Cahill noted that in some of these reproductions, details such as the folds in the drapery were lost, diminishing the sense of spatial depth—a characteristic he also observed in the illustrations for the Judge Dee series.[41]

Another notable and deliberate departure van Gulik made from traditional Chinese artistic conventions was his use of black, particularly in the depiction of nighttime scenes. In traditional Chinese woodblock prints, visual elements explicitly indicating nighttime are rarely depicted. Extending this artistic approach more broadly in Chinese painting, nighttime scenes are typically conveyed through contextual elements such as the moon, atmospheric cues, or the artwork's title, rather than through large areas of visual darkness. In some cases, even when a painting's title references nighttime, the visual depiction may not explicitly convey it. For instance, in *Yueye Kanchao Tu* 月夜看潮图 (Watching the Tide at Night, Fig. 16) by Li Song 李嵩 (1166–1243), the scene is rendered with restrained brushwork, showing delicate details of architecture and trees, evoking a sense of stillness and emptiness. However, although the title and inscription refer to "night" and "moon," there is scholarly debate as to whether the scene depicts nighttime or twilight, as visual cues are absent.[42] An example of comparison is *Yangcheng Yeshi Tu* 羊城夜市图 (Night Market in Guangzhou), which is attributed to the Italian Jesuit missionary and Qing court painter Giuseppe Castiglione (1688–1766) (Fig. 17). Sullivan argues that the

[41] James Cahill, "Judge Dee and the vanishing Ming erotic colour prints," *Orientations (Hong Kong)* 34, no. 9 (2003): 40–42.

[42] For example, Peng Huiping identified the scene as late at night, while Shi Shouqian points out that the lingering light on the distant mountains suggests dusk. Peng Huiping 彭慧萍, *Xuni de diantang: nansong huayuan zhi shengshe zhi zhi yu houshi xiangxiang* 虚拟的殿堂：南宋画院之省舍职制与后世想象 [Southern Song Painting Academy: Its Organization and Post-1279 Historiographical Reconstruction] (Beijing: Peiking University Press, 2018), 114; Shi Shouqian 石守谦, *Shan ming gu ying: zhongguo shanshuihua he guanzhong de lishi* 山鸣谷应: 中国山水画和观众的历史 [Echoes Between Mountains and Valleys: A History of Chinese Landscape Painting and Its Viewers] (Shanghai: Shanghai Shuhua Chubanshe, 2019), 72.

technique in this painting reflects a European artist replacing a pen with a Chinese brush, with certain details influenced by French engravings.[43] The bright moon, illuminated boats, and carefully rendered light and shadow integrate both Chinese and Western artistic techniques, clearly conveying the theme of nighttime to the viewer.

In Judge Dee stories, van Gulik, working within the detective fiction genre, adopted a more direct visual approach. He incorporated broad black backgrounds to explicitly depict night, heightening the eerie atmosphere and aligning more closely with Western readers' visual expectations. For example, when he wrote his first original novel, *The Chinese Bell Murders*, he already designed two out of fifteen illustrations as nighttime scenes, suggesting his preference for these kinds of scenes. In Fig. 18, the voyeur outside the window gazes at the naked woman, his figure set against the deep blackness of the night. The darkness not only establishes the nocturnal setting but also serves as a metaphor for danger and moral transgression, such as voyeurism and intrusion. In Fig. 19, in addition to the nighttime backdrop, van Gulik depicts the massive shadow of the bronze bell cast onto the ground, creating a stark visual contrast with the white bones. This contrast heightens the dramatic tension of the scene and reinforces the atmosphere of death.

Van Gulik's approach to woodblock print aesthetics thus represents both an homage to traditional Chinese illustration techniques and an adaptation that suited his own artistic vision and practical constraints. His simplification of linework, strategic omission of details, and emphasis on readability and visual contrast reflect a hybrid style rooted in historical Chinese sources yet filtered through a Western author's eye. This hybrid style remained consistent throughout his creation of more than a dozen novels. By examining the changes in his

[43] Michael Sullivan, *The Meeting of Eastern and Western Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 74.

illustrations from different stages of his career, we can gain a clearer understanding of the evolution of his visual expression and the broader exploration of cross-cultural artistic exchange.

Evolution of van Gulik's Illustrations

Van Gulik's original Judge Dee series consists of 14 novels and two short story collections. However, his earliest attempts at illustration appeared in his translated works, which can be seen as an initial exploration of cross-cultural representation aimed at introducing Chinese visual culture to Western audiences. In 1949, he privately published *Dee Goong An: Three Murder Cases Solved* in Tokyo, a translation of the first thirty chapters of the anonymous Qing dynasty novel *Wu Zetian si da qi an* 武则天四大奇案 (The Four Great Strange Cases of Empress Wu), which was later revised and officially published in 1967 under the title *Celebrated Cases of Judge Dee*.[44] This book contains a total of nine illustrations, with van Gulik noting that three were reproductions of original Chinese pictures, while the remaining six were his creations inspired by the Chinese work.

Seven of the nine illustrations in this book center around the protagonist, Judge Dee, yet they exhibit distinct stylistic differences. It is evident that at this stage, van Gulik was still in the early phases of experimenting with an appropriate visual presentation, and it was only in his later original novels that his illustrations developed into a more refined and cohesive style. For example, the interrogation scenes in the preface and the twentieth chapter (Fig. 20 and 21) differ significantly in terms of characters, composition, and atmosphere. The first illustration, titled "One of the Ten Judges of Hell," is indicated as a direct reproduction from a Tang

[44] Robert Hans van Gulik, trans, *Celebrated Cases of Judge Dee = Dee Goong an: An Authentic Eighteenth-Century Chinese Detective Novel* (New York: Dover Publications, 1976).

dynasty illustrated scroll and is included as a reference to the supernatural and ghostly elements commonly found in traditional Chinese crime fiction, as mentioned in the preface.[45] The Ten Judges, or Ten Kings of Hell, refer to a group of underworld magistrates responsible for judging souls in the afterlife—a concept that emerged during the Sinicization of Chinese Buddhism. The composition and content of this illustration echo a classical motif found in the frontispiece of the *Diamond Sutra*: the depiction of the underworld court modeled after a county magistrate's tribunal. Following the *Diamond Sutra*, this compositional model became a standardized visual motif for numerous Buddhist scriptures and popular religious prints.[46] In contrast, the second represents van Gulik's original creation of a courtroom scene. While it shares certain similarities with his later courtroom illustrations, it also demonstrates differences. The clothing of the kneeling figure lacks depth, with unnatural folds, and the fully back-facing posture does not appear in later illustrations. These elements further suggest that at this stage, Van Gulik had not yet fully researched Chinese sources such as *Lienü zhuan*.

"Judge Dee reading in his library" (Fig.22) is another noteworthy illustration. Although van Gulik stated that this illustration was also derived from a Chinese woodblock print, this claim has been met with skepticism. James Cahill argued that the "distinctive drawing and the whole conception" were van Gulik's own, attributing this to the interplay between his dual roles as both the author of the Judge Dee series and a sinologist.[47] The perspective and spatial depth of the bookshelf on the right side of the composition, in particular, suggest a departure from

[45] Van Gulik, *Celebrated Cases of Judge Dee*, II-III.

[46] Shih-shan Susan Huang, "Illustrating the Efficacy of the Diamond Sutra in Vernacular Buddhism," *Gugong xueshu jikan* 故宫学术季刊 35, no. 4 (2018): 49–55.

[47] Cahill, "Judge dee and the vanishing Ming erotic colour prints," 44–45.

traditional Chinese painting conventions. This early illustration reveals a key aspect of van Gulik's artistic approach—interpreting and reimagining Chinese culture through a Western visual perspective. In his later works, this approach became more refined; he conducted more detailed studies and references for elements such as furniture, plants, and clothing, ensuring greater historical accuracy. However, in terms of narrative composition and character depiction, he continued to follow to Western artistic conventions more closely.

After completing the translation of Dee *Goong An*, van Gulik's original writing went through at least two distinct phases. The first phase includes *The Chinese Bell Murders, The Chinese Maze Murders, The Chinese Lake Murders, The Chinese Gold Murders,* and *The Chinese Nail Murders.* In these works, he closely adhered to the Chinese tradition, such as structuring the narrative around three cases and employing symmetrical, descriptive titles. In the later phase, he reduced the number of characters, focused on a single main case, and replaced traditional titles with plain numerical ones like "Chapter One," reflecting a shift toward a more streamlined and Westernized structure."[48] Van Gulik's shift in writing style was influenced by suggestions from Western readers and also reflected his preference for a more concise narrative structure and Western literary conventions.[49] As Sabrina Yuan Hao points out, "He retells the Chinese stories according to the convention of Western detective fiction."[50]

Similar to his writing, van Gulik also sought to align his illustrations more closely with the conventions of Western detective fiction. His early illustrations primarily focused on relatively subdued scenes, such as trials, fights, and conversations. However, in his later works,

[48] Barkman and Van der Hoeven, *Dutch Mandarin: The Life and Work of Robert Hans van Gulik*, 226.

[49] Hao, "Transcending Cultural Boundaries: Robert van Gulik's Judge Dee Detective Stories," 563.

[50] Hao, "Transcending Cultural Boundaries: Robert van Gulik's Judge Dee Detective Stories," 554.

he placed greater emphasis on the dramatic tension and atmosphere of the narrative, incorporating artistic expressions and cultural elements more aligned with Western artistic conventions. For example, in scenes depicting women being attacked, the early illustration from *The Chinese Bell Murders* (Fig. 18) relies mainly on the nighttime setting to create a sense of tension. In contrast, the atmosphere is significantly more dramatic in his later work *The Willow Pattern* (Fig. 23). Here, the woman covers her face with her hands, while the man appears menacing, his face contorted. Most strikingly, the dark shadow formed by the lines behind the man does not mirror his movements, suggesting the presence of another sinister assailant lurking in the night. This heightened visual tension demonstrates van Gulik's evolving approach to illustration, aligning more closely with the suspense-driven aesthetics of Western detective fiction. van Gulik skillfully incorporates Western visual elements to heighten the atmosphere of suspense and horror. For instance, in an illustration from *The Willow Pattern* as well (Fig. 24), two black-clad, hooded assailants attempt to attack a woman. Their imagery is inspired by the plague doctors of the Black Death era, evoking connotations of death and foreboding.

In his final work, *Poets and Murder*, Judge Dee, upon entering a desolate and eerie ancestral shrine at night, hears a rustling sound from the vegetation behind him while conversing with a woman. As he turns around, he sees several foxes leaping onto the crumbling wall, their green-glowing eyes fixed on him. In one of the illustrations of this work (Fig. 25) the black foxes appear almost humanoid, staring intently at the two oblivious figures, thus intensifying the reader's sense of unease. In his postscript, van Gulik also mentioned the long-standing tradition of the fox in Chinese literature.[51] However, the foxes in his works do not conform to the alluring

[51] Robert Hans van Gulik, *Poets and Murder* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 174.

and seductive representations often found in Chinese cultural narratives. Instead, they are rendered in a manner that accentuates horror and fear. This approach can be contextualized within the medieval and Renaissance European cultural landscape, where foxes were sometimes associated with demonic symbolism, and the color black further reinforced notions of death and malevolence.[52] Here, the fox serves as a visual motif that bridges Eastern and Western cultural imaginaries, facilitating a nuanced cross-cultural dialogue within van Gulik's artistic and literary framework.

In terms of composition, Robert van Gulik made bold experiments in his later works. *The Willow Pattern* features an illustration depicting Judge Dee's assistant, Ma Rong, rescuing a drowning woman (Fig. 26). Without prior context, a viewer might easily mistake this image for a purely Western-style illustration. It lacks the scattered perspective and diagonal layout commonly found in traditional Chinese woodblock prints, as well as visual elements that explicitly reflect Chinese culture. In this illustration, a woman in the water extends her hands toward a man, who leans forward in response. Her hair drifts along with the aquatic plants in the current, while small fish swim in the lower portion of the scene. The two figures form a triangular composition, emphasizing the dynamic movement within the image. This scene, in both pose and composition, is reminiscent of Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam* (Fig. 27). In *The Creation of Adam*, the impending touch between God and Adam's fingers serves as the focal point of the painting. Although the orientations of the figures differ, van Gulik's illustration similarly presents Ma Rong and the drowning woman in fluid, diagonal postures. Both figures extend their hands toward each other, creating a comparable sense of visual tension. This

[52] Janetta Rebold Benton, *Holy Terrors: Gargoyles on Medieval Buildings* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1997), 82.

deliberate departure from traditional Chinese compositional techniques reflects van Gulik's ongoing exploration of artistic hybridity.

Wei Yan argues that van Gulik sought to create a sense of *déjà vu* (familiar strangeness) for both Chinese and Western readers in his novels—an effect that also manifests in his illustrations. This feeling combines a strong sense of recognition with a subtle uncanniness, often triggered by narrative structures, visual motifs, or cultural tropes that the viewer may have previously encountered, either directly or through mediated cultural memory.[53] He continuously sought to integrate Chinese and Western literary and artistic traditions in both his writing and illustrations. Through successive experiments across different stages of his work, he gradually refined his visual language and narrative style, ensuring that his illustrations maintained distinct Chinese cultural characteristics while also appealing to the aesthetic sensibilities and interpretive habits of Western readers.

[53] Wei, "Lun digong an gushi zhong de zhongxi hudong," 90–91.

CHAPTER III

VAN GULIK'S CONSTRUCTION OF CHINESE CULTURE

As discussed in the Chapter II, Robert van Gulik never established a "genuine old Chinese style." His representation of Chinese culture in the Judge Dee stories is highly selective. Such selectivity is not only reflected in his artistic style but also his portrayal of Chinese society, gender relations, and cultural values. Through both text and image, van Gulik constructs an idealized vision of China. Here, idealization refers to a cognitive and representational process in which specific characteristics are emphasized, refined, or romanticized in order to create an image that aligns with individual or collective values. In cross-cultural writing, idealization often involves the selective presentation of a culture, which may stem from a nostalgic longing for its history and traditions or serve as a means of constructing the "Other" to reinforce one's own cultural identity. In the Judge Dee series, van Gulik reconstructs traditional Chinese culture by adopting the style of Ming dynasty woodblock prints while simultaneously shaping his idealized representations of males and females. This process of idealization is not merely an aesthetic choice, it is also an expression of personal identity and a site where cultural hybridity and Orientalism intersect.

Constructing Masculinity: Judge Dee as Self-Projection

Judge Dee was van Gulik himself, as he remarked at a friend's dinner gathering."[54] This statement is hardly surprising; Judge Dee serves as a projection of van Gulik himself, an idealized self-image that reflects his intellectual aspirations, cultural affinities, and personal interpretation of Chinese tradition. Van Gulik stated that "Chinese magistrates like Judge Dee

[54] Janwillem Van de Wetering, *Robert van Gulik: His Life, His Work* (Miami Beach, FL: Dennis McMillan Publications, 1995), 25.

were men of great moral strength and intellectual power, and at the same time refined literati, thoroughly conversant with Chinese arts and letters."[55] At the core of this portrayal is the figure of the traditional scholar-official, a role that merges scholarly pursuits with governmental responsibilities—much like van Gulik, who embodied both the diplomat and the sinologist. As Wetering described, van Gulik spent most of his evenings in his study writing articles in Chinese, practicing Arabic and Sanskrit, developing plots for the Judge Dee stories, and sketching nude figures in the style of Ming dynasty prints. After only a few hours of rest, he would rise early and leave for work.[56] This dual identity also defines Judge Dee's life. His role as a magistrate is primarily expressed through his handling of legal cases, which serves as the central narrative thread of the novels. In this capacity, he is depicted as composed and wise, a characterization that van Gulik consistently reinforces through the courtroom illustrations in each novel. In *The Chinese Nail Murders*, van Gulik included a portrait of Judge Dee (Fig. 28), taken from *Gu shengxian xiang zhuanlüe* 古圣贤像传略 (Biographical Sketches of Ancient Sages and Worthies), a woodblock-printed book compiled by the Qing scholar Gu Yuan 顾沅 (1799–1851).[57] Here, Judge Dee is depicted wearing his official robes, and holding an ivory tablet in his right hand as a symbol of his status. His expression is solemn, and the slight downward drop of the wrinkles at the corners of his eyes conveys the dignity and wisdom of an experienced magistrate. This portrait precisely captures the official aspect of Judge Dee's persona—an image that van Gulik admired and aspired to embody.

[55] Van Gulik, *Celebrated Cases of Judge Dee*, XIII.

[56] Van de Wetering, *Robert van Gulik: His Life, His Work*, 6–7.

[57] Robert Hans van Gulik, *The Chinese Nail Murders: Judge Dee's Last Three Cases: A Chinese Detective Story Suggested by Original Ancient Chinese Plots* (London: Joseph, 1961), 212.

Beyond his official status, van Gulik sought to express his identification with the culture of the scholar-officials in his illustrations. However, this identity is conveyed in a more subtle manner, primarily through cultural symbols that appear in the process of crime-solving—such as the *qin* (Fig. 29) or the scholar's studio (Fig. 30). These objects are not merely decorative elements within the setting but serve as visual markers of Judge Dee's scholarly persona. For instance, in an illustration from *The Chinese Maze Murders*, Judge Dee is searching for clues in the study of a deceased literatus (Fig. 30). The novel provides a meticulous description of the objects arranged on the scholar's desk, including an inkstone, a bamboo brush holder, a red porcelain vessel, and a paperweight.[58] The illustration aligns with the textual description, emphasizing the spatial arrangement of these scholarly implements. Judge Dee gazes at these objects with a slightly puzzled expression, as if contemplating their possible connections to the case. A similar example, previously discussed in Chapter II (Fig. 22), portrays Judge Dee in his leisure time, reclining comfortably in an armchair and engrossed in a book by candlelight. Nearby, a side table holds a neatly arranged stack of books and scrolls, while a seven-stringed *guqin* is prominently placed beside them. Van Gulik noted that "playing an instrument was one of the accomplishments of every refined scholar-official" and even compared Judge Dee's skill to that of Western detectives, remarking that he "would have done better than Sherlock Holmes on his violin."[59] These portraits, thus, can be seen as projections of van Gulik himself.

His deep engagement with Chinese *qin* is evident in his 1941 publication *The Lore of the Chinese Lute: An Essay in Ch'in Ideology*, which was a significant contribution to the field.

[58] Van Gulik, *The Chinese maze murders*, 94–95.

[59] Van Gulik, *Celebrated Cases of Judge Dee*, XV.

Following the death of his *qin* teacher, Ye Shimeng 叶诗梦 (1863–1937), van Gulik created a commemorative portrait based on Ye's photograph (Fig. 31). According to Chen Zhimai, van Gulik, hesitant to attempt a purely Chinese painting, instead used Chinese watercolor pigments to create a Western-style portrait—an approach that parallels his technique in illustrating the Judge Dee mysteries.[60] van Gulik's profound interest in Ming dynasty material culture made him the first Sinologist to systematically introduce Wen Zhenheng's *Changwu zhi* 长物志 (Superfluous Things) and other Ming-era connoisseurship texts to Western academia.[61] These works primarily focus on the living spaces of literati, offering detailed descriptions of interior arrangements, scholarly studios, scholars' implements, and treasured collectibles.[62] Van Gulik's study was deeply influenced by this literati aesthetic, reflecting his admiration for and emulation of the traditional scholar-official lifestyle.

Judge Dee's dual identity as both official and scholar serves as a concrete embodiment of van Gulik's idealized vision of Chinese culture. However, van Gulik does not limit his portrayal to this traditional framework; he also integrates elements of Western detective fiction, presenting Judge Dee as a figure who embodies both rational intellect and physical confrontation. Hao argues that the hardboiled detective fiction tradition influences the character of Judge Dee, as he not only relies on logical deduction to solve cases but also demonstrates exceptional martial

[60] Zhang Zhimai 张之迈, "Helan Gao Luopei" 荷兰高罗佩 [Dutch Robert van Gulik], in *Gao Luopei Shiji* 高罗佩事辑 [A Collection of Matters regarding Robert van Gulik] ed. by Yan Xiaoxing 严晓星 (Beijing: Haitun Chubanshe, 2011), 17.

[61] Craig Clunas, *Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China* (Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 9.

[62] Robert Hans van Gulik, *Chinese Pictorial Art as Viewed by the Connoisseur; Notes on the Means and Methods of Traditional Chinese Connoisseurship of Pictorial Art, Based upon a Study of the Art of Mounting Scrolls in China and Japan* (Roma: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1958), 51.

skills, engaging in close combat when faced with threats.[63] *The Chinese Gold Case* includes a fight scene, vividly described in the text and accompanied by an illustration (Fig. 32). In this scene, upon encountering assailants, Judge Dee swiftly removes his long robe, divides his long beard into two sections, ties them behind his neck, and then draws his sword to engage in battle.[64] The illustration precisely captures this detail, heightening the dramatic tension of the scene and reinforcing the distinctiveness of the character's depiction. Notably, Judge Dee's long-bearded appearance and the act of tying his beard before combat introduce an element of cultural hybridity, blending both Western and Chinese influences. On one hand, this representation aligns with the decisive and action-oriented qualities characteristic of Western hardboiled detectives. On the other hand, the long beard and combat style resonate with traditional Chinese literary heroism, evoking figures such as Guan Yu 关羽 (160–220 CE), a military general who served during the Eastern Han period (25–220 CE). This fusion of influences suggests that Judge Dee's portrayal reflects both a Western imagination of Chinese figures and a visual and narrative engagement with China's own martial and chivalric traditions.

Placing the figure of Judge Dee—both a learned Confucian and a physically capable detective—within its historical context reveals its significant gendered significance. In the mid-twentieth century, Western societies were undergoing a reconfiguration of masculinity, especially in response to the social disruptions following World War II. The emergence of the "hardboiled detective" archetype, emphasizing rationality, autonomy, and physical strength, responded to

[63] Sabrina Yuan Hao, *Robert van Gulik and His Chinese Sherlock Holmes: The Global Travels of Judge Dee*, Vol. 103 (Leiden: Brill, 2024), 117–121.

[64] Van Gulik, *The Chinese Gold Murders* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 23.

growing societal anxieties about traditional masculinity.[65] Simultaneously, masculinity also became a contested site within the broader colonial discourse, particularly in the construction of the "Oriental male." As Lei points out, late Qing and Republican-era Chinese men were subjected to three dominant colonial narratives: the "effeminate scholar," the "Sick Man of Asia," and the "Yellow Peril"—each framing Chinese masculinity as either weak, pathologized, or threatening to Western hegemony.[66] In response, reform-minded Chinese intellectuals began to reflect critically on these externally imposed identities and sought to redefine Chinese masculinity in the context of modernization. This redefinition, as Lei argues, often took place within the temporal and spatial frameworks of "elsewhen" and "elsewhere"—drawing upon Confucian tradition for cultural continuity while also incorporating influences from West and Japan to reshape the self.[67] The tension between *wen* (literary) and *wu* (martial) became central in this redefining process. In the late Qing and early Republican era, certain reformist intellectuals increasingly emphasized *wu* values as a counter to colonial discourses.[68] For instance, in his series of essays titled *Xinmin shuo* 新民说 (On the New Citizen), Liang Qichao 梁启超 (1873–1929) advocated for the promotion of a *shangwu* 尚武 (martial spirit), emphasizing that the rise of European powers and Japan was largely attributable to their valorization of military strength. In contrast, he critiqued China's global reputation for being

[65] Robert J Corber, *Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 5–8.

[66] Jun Lei, "Colonial stereotypes and martialized intellectual masculinity in late Qing and early Republican China," *Modern China* 48, no. 2 (2022): 423.

[67] Lei, "Colonial stereotypes and martialized intellectual masculinity in late Qing and early Republican China," 422.

[68] Lei, "Colonial stereotypes and martialized intellectual masculinity in late Qing and early Republican China," 422–423, 429–435.

wenruo 文弱 (cultured yet feeble), framing this as a weakness that needed to be overcome for national revitalization.[69] Within this context, van Gulik's illustrated portrayal of Judge Dee not only revises Western depictions of Chinese masculinity—moving away from the evil exoticism of Fu Manchu or the frailty of the "Sick Man of Asia"—but also resonates with efforts by twentieth-century Chinese reformers to reconstruct ideals of manhood in a transcultural framework, combining rational authority with physical strength.

Van Gulik's illustrations, steeped in Ming literati aesthetics yet inflected with hardboiled detective tropes, constructing an idealized masculine persona that simultaneously reflects his personal identity, engages with Chinese cultural traditions, and responds to both Western and Chinese discourses on masculinity.

Construction of Femininity: The Naked Women in Judge Dee Stories

If van Gulik constructed an idealized projection of masculinity through the character of Judge Dee, how then did he represent women? His illustrations include three female types: the wife, the martial heroine, and the courtesan. Each of these types is, at least once, depicted in a state of nudity or partial undress. It is evident that the most distinctive visual element in the Judge Dee series is the depiction of nude women, which appear consistently throughout his full-length novels. These illustrations not only serve a narrative function but also reflect van Gulik's perception and imagination of Chinese—or more broadly, East Asian—women.

[69] Liang Qichao 梁启超, *Xinmin shuo* 新民说 [On the New Citizen] (Shenyang: Liaoning Renmin Chubanshe, 1994): 147–151.

Van Gulik stated that his interest in illustrating nude women originated from a suggestion made by his publisher while preparing the Japanese edition of *The Chinese Maze Murders*.[70] Written in 1950, the novel was completed while van Gulik was serving as an adviser to the Netherlands Military Mission in Kyoto, Japan. Immediately after its completion, it was translated into Japanese and published in 1951, making it the first original Judge Dee story to be released, with a cover of nude women (Fig. 33). In his note, he wrote that:

> Since in post-war Japan there had arisen a "cult of the nude," the publisher insisted on my including a female nude in the cover design; I informed him that I could not do that, because I wanted to keep my illustrations in genuine old Chinese style, and that in China, owing to the prudish Confucianist tradition, there never developed an artistic school of drawing nude human bodies. The publisher, however, wanted me to make sure of this anyway, so I wrote identical letters to a few dozen antiquarian booksellers in China and Japan of my acquaintance, asking whether they had Ming prints of nudes…I purchased these blocks… Thus I discovered that there had indeed existed in China a cult of the nude…The female nude that ultimately appeared on the cover of the Japanese edition of The Chinese Maze Murders, and all other nudes in the plates I added to my novels, all based on those Ming albums.[71]

However, van Gulik's interest in illustrating nude women was not solely driven by his publisher's suggestion but also stemmed from his inclinations. One piece of evidence supporting this is his 1949 publication of Dee Goong An, which includes an illustration of a semi-nude woman undergoing interrogation—a drawing that he chose as the book's cover (Fig. 34). Since Dee Goong An was a privately published work, it can be inferred that the selection and creation of illustrations were primarily dictated by van Gulik's own artistic and editorial choices rather than publisher requirements. But, the use of erotic elements on book covers was not exclusive to Japan. Hao noted that the use of sexually suggestive female imagery on covers to create sensational effects was a prevalent trend in detective fiction at the time, likely influenced by the relaxation of censorship regarding sexuality in the post-war era. This phenomenon was

[70] Van Gulik, notes for *The Chinese Maze Murders* in "Remarks on my Judge Dee Novels," 1–2.

[71] Van Gulik, notes for *The Chinese Maze Murders* in "Remarks on my Judge Dee Novels," 1–2.

also evident in the repackaging of early works by Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie, which incorporated similar elements to appeal to contemporary audiences.[72] The design of Robert van Gulik's book covers was primarily his creation, including the composition, typography, and other visual elements, as seen in the draft of the cover of Murder in Canton (Fig. 35).[73]

Eventually, after acquiring Ming dynasty erotic albums from booksellers in Shanghai and Kyoto, Robert van Gulik gained additional references for his illustrations of nude women. A key question to consider is how van Gulik's depictions of nude women compare to traditional Chinese erotic paintings. Examining this comparison helps us understand the extent to which his work adhered to or diverged from Chinese pictorial conventions, thereby shedding light on how he modified representations of Chinese women and constructed his idealized vision of Chinese femininity. In traditional Chinese erotic woodblock prints, female figures often lack the pronounced feminine characteristics seen in Robert van Gulik's illustrations, which exhibit a heightened emphasis on anatomical structure, particularly in the representation of bodily proportions and gestural postures. He adopted a more anatomically detailed approach, accentuating distinct female attributes such as firm breasts, elongated legs, a subtly rounded abdomen, and long, flowing hair (Fig. 36). This mode of representation aligns with Western artistic conventions in the depiction of naked women, rendering his illustrations more akin to European visual traditions of the female form. In most illustrations, he deliberately conceals the

[72] Hao, *Robert van Gulik and His Chinese Sherlock Holmes: The Global Travels of Judge Dee*, 116–117.

[73] Van Gulik, "Note on the Illustrations of the Judge Dee novels."

female figure's feet (Figs. 36, 37), regarding this as an adherence to Chinese artistic conventions, which also facilitated the later publication of a Chinese-language edition.[74]

In contrast, *Huaying jinzhen* 花营锦阵 (Variegated Positions of the Flowery Battle), a woodblock-printed erotic album from Van Gulik's collection, serves as an example of such a type of work produced during the Ming dynasty and offers a comparative perspective. For example, the gender characteristics in Fig. 38 are relatively ambiguous, as the male and female figures exhibit similar body types. The woman's breasts are slightly larger than the man's but subtly sagging, and her hair is neatly arranged in a traditional bun. The most pronounced gender contrast is conveyed through the woman's bound feet, enclosed in shoes, juxtaposed with the man's standard bare feet, as well as the depiction of male genitalia. In another set of *Fengliu juechang tu,* collected by Van Gulik, the gender differences between male and female figures are more pronounced. The artist no longer depicts the male figure with a visible chest. Yet, the hairstyles, eyebrows, and facial expressions remain highly similar (Fig. 39). After this set was introduced to Japan, it was reproduced under the title *Fūryū Zetchō Zu* (Fig. 40, 41). The artist incorporated elements such as clothing, hairstyles, and interior furnishings into a Japanese style.[75] As an early example of *ukiyo-e*, this work also served as a source of inspiration for subsequent Japanese artists.[76]

In some erotic paintings, women's undergarments are retained. James Cahill suggests that this may indicate that gazing at women's breasts was not as arousing for Chinese men as it was

[74] Robert Hans van Gulik, *The Chinese Gold Murders: A Judge Dee Detective Story* (New York: Perennial, 2004), 197-202.

[75] James Sören Edgren, "Late-Ming erotic book illustrations and the origins of ukiyo-e prints," *Arts Asiatiques* (2011): 124–128.

[76] Edgren, "Late-Ming erotic book illustrations and the origins of ukiyo-e prints," 133.

in the West. Instead, they found bound feet and the small, embroidered shoes worn on them to be more erotically stimulating.[77] During the Ming dynasty, the primary purchasers of erotic albums such as *Huaying jinzhen* were typically men. However, these albums were not intended as objects for male masturbation; instead, they were often presented by men to women as instructional guides for sexual practices.[78] It is noteworthy that van Gulik regarded the production of erotic woodblock prints as an elegant literati pursuit, as these images were often the collaborative work of highly skilled painters, poets (some prints were accompanied by poetry), and masterful woodblock carvers.[79] In other words, both in his study of Chinese erotic prints and in his illustrations for the Judge Dee series, van Gulik continued to construct his idealized vision of the scholar-official as the embodiment of the ideal Chinese masculinity.

A further compelling example of artistic contrast lies in the depiction of female body postures within similar settings. In Judge Dee illustrations, certain scenes portray women reclining naked in their boudoirs (Fig. 42), adopting subtly seductive poses while gazing directly at both the male character within the composition and the viewer beyond the image. This mode of representation evokes comparisons with Western paintings, such as Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (Fig. 43), where the female figure's direct gaze establishes an intimate and inviting dynamic. In contrast, Figures 44 and 45, drawn from illustrations of the Ming Dynasty novel *Xixiang ji* and *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅 (The Plum of the Golden Vase), depict women in similar reclining positions within a bedroom setting. However, their gazes are averted—either lowered

[77] James Cahill, "Chapter 2: Erotic Painting Up to Early Qing: the Older Album Type," https://jamescahill.info/illustrated-writings/chinese-erotic-painting/chapter-2.

[78] Clunas, *Pictures and Visuality in Early Modern China*, 157.

[79] Van Gulik, *Erotic Colour Prints of the Ming Period*, lxxvi- lxxvii.

or with eyes closed—accompanied by gentle and tranquil expressions. Their bodies are partially veiled in soft garments, exuding a more reserved and introspective demeanor that aligns with the aesthetics of modesty and restraint traditionally emphasized in Chinese visual culture.

Moreover, within the context of these bedroom scenes, traditional Chinese erotic art places significant emphasis on the spatial dichotomy between the "interior" and "exterior," with the bedroom and garden serving as intimate spaces where romantic encounters typically unfold. Chinese erotic prints meticulously depict these environments, highlighting their symbolic significance. The garden, in particular, functions as an ambiguous space for Chinese women—a place where young women of respectable households could freely spend their leisure time, yet one that also carries the risk and allure of voyeurism.[80] This duality ensures that acts of voyeurism and gazing remain within a relatively safe and controlled environment, aligning with the aesthetics of *guifang zhi le* 闺房之乐 (boudoir pleasures). In contrast, in van Gulik's illustrations, women are often subjected to male gazes or voyeurism in virtually any setting, and at times, they are even physically beaten (Fig. 46). This gaze is also framed as one or more fully clothed men observing a nude woman, reinforcing a stark visual contrast that underscores a fundamental power imbalance. Hao points out that van Gulik positioned these nude women as the visual focal point, with the underlying male gaze embodying a combination of voyeuristic and sadistic elements.[81] However, despite the visual appeal of these women, whether clothed or nude, they are never the protagonists of the Judge Dee stories. Instead, they function merely as narrative devices that propel the plot forward in what is ultimately a male-dominated story. In the

[80] James Cahill, "Chapter 10: Three Recurring Themes in the Part-Erotic Albums," https://jamescahill.info/illustrated-writings/chinese-erotic-painting/10-three-recurring-themes-in-the-part-erotic-albums.

[81] Hao, *Robert van Gulik and His Chinese Sherlock Holmes: The Global Travels of Judge Dee*, 161–166.

illustrations, these female figures primarily serve as erotic elements; upon closer examination, their individual features appear indistinct and interchangeable. In contrast, the only figure consistently rendered with clarity and detail is the bearded male protagonist, Judge Dee.

In Judge Dee Stories, another type of female figure is the understanding and virtuous wife. Van Gulik deliberately assigned Judge Dee three wives, constructing an idealized vision of a harmonious polygamous household free of conflict.[82] In the illustration from *The Haunted Monastery* (Fig. 47), these three wives appear together for the first time. The first wife is depicted with her back partially exposed as she gazes into a mirror while dressing her hair; the second wife, clad in a sheer robe, holds the mirror for her; and the third wife, having already arranged her hair, is about to draw open the curtains. Judge Dee's gaze appears to rest on the senior wife, reinforcing a male-centered perspective. Notably, in reality, it was unlikely that a woman would willingly expose herself while opening a window. The composition would rather suggest that the scene was constructed through the lens of the male gaze. The mirror in the composition further accentuates this notion, symbolizing an idealized reflection of marital harmony. The interactions among the three wives, much like the reflection in the mirror, present a utopian vision of marriage shaped by aesthetic and ideological ideals rather than lived experience.

Whether or not van Gulik's nude illustrations represent the sexualization of Asian women through an Orientalist lens, one thing is certain—his Chinese wife, Shui Shifang, did not approve of them. Barkman cites a passage from van Gulik's manuscript, stating that Shui disapproved of these erotic illustrations because they represented the darker aspects of Chinese society—subjects that were traditionally considered taboo among conservative Chinese "young ladies"

[82] Barkman, and Van der Hoeven, *Dutch Mandarin: The Life and Work of Robert Hans van Gulik*, 279.

and thus not openly discussed.[83] However, van Gulik's nude illustrations, along with his later work *Sexual Life in Ancient China*, significantly influenced Western scholars' understanding and study of gender and sexuality in China. For instance, Michel Foucault references related materials in *The History of Sexuality*, in which he constructs an image of China as an alternative model to Western sexual norms; the East is associated with erotic art, whereas the West is characterized by a scientific discourse on sexuality.[84] Notably, Foucault's understanding and citation of Chinese erotic art were primarily derived from van Gulik's research.[85]

Van Gulik's illustrations and scholarly contributions occupy a complex position within the cross-cultural exchange of ideas about gender, sexuality, and representation. His depictions of nude women not only reflected his personal artistic and academic interests but also contributed to broader cross-cultural exchanges, reinforcing and, at times, redefining Western perceptions of Chinese erotic traditions. Moreover, through these illustrations and his writings, van Gulik constructed an idealized vision of Chinese femininity—one that oscillated between the virtuous, refined literati woman and the sensual, exoticized beauty. This duality not only aligned with his broader vision of an idealized pre-modern China but also echoed long-standing Western fantasies about the East.

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[83] Barkman, and Van der Hoeven, *Dutch Mandarin: The Life and Work of Robert Hans van Gulik*, 176.

[84] Leon Antonio Rocha, "Scientia Sexualis versus Ars Erotica: Foucault, van Gulik, Needham," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science. Part C, Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 42, no. 3 (2011): 330.

[85] Rocha, "Scientia Sexualis versus Ars Erotica: Foucault, van Gulik, Needham," 334–336.

Tradition and Modernity

Van Gulik's first visit to China occurred in 1935 when he passed through Harbin on his way to Japan. There, he experienced a sense of disillusionment with China, prompting him to lament that "Where were the refined Chinese scholars, writing poetry in their elegant miniature gardens, where their dainty damsels? It was a terrible disillusion."[86] This reflects an Orientalist perspective, embodying Robert van Gulik's longing for an idealized, timeless China—an imagined realm shaped by classical literature, literati culture, and artistic traditions. His vision reveals a sense of bewilderment or even rejection toward social changes in contemporary China. Van Gulik's conception of China was not merely nostalgic but also culturally conservative, as he venerated the ancient past while resisting the country's modernization. He refused to write in vernacular Chinese and even avoided using modern punctuation in his works. Later, he strongly opposed the simplified Chinese characters introduced by the People's Republic of China.[87] Even after 1949, he remained deeply committed to the study of ancient China, showing little interest in the transformations brought about by the Communist regime.[88] In terms of artistic preference, he held the Ming dynasty in the highest regard. His study in Tokyo was named *Zunming Ge* 尊明阁 (Hall of respecting Ming), carrying a dual significance: first, as a reference to the moral integrity and uprightness associated with the character "Ming" 明; second, as an expression of his admiration for Ming dynasty culture, which was also reflected in his collection, predominantly composed of Ming-era artifacts.[89]

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[86] Barkman, and Van der Hoeven, *Dutch Mandarin: The Life and Work of Robert Hans van Gulik*, 30.

[87] Barkman, and Van der Hoeven, *Dutch Mandarin: The Life and Work of Robert Hans van Gulik*, 105.

[88] Barkman, and Van der Hoeven, *Dutch Mandarin: The Life and Work of Robert Hans van Gulik*, 235..

[89] Zhang, "Helan Gao Luopei," 8.

One of the reasons van Gulik was so fond of Ming dynasty culture was its role in the revival of Han Chinese traditions. He repeatedly sought to clarify and reinforce the image of the Chinese people in the postscript of his Judge Dee novels:

> Note that in Judge Dee's time the Chinese did not wear pigtails; that custom was imposed on them after 1644 A.D. when the Manchus had conquered China. The men did their hair up in a top-knot, they wore caps both inside and outside the house. They did not smoke; tobacco and opium were introduced into China only many centuries later.[90]

As the last dynasty ruled by the Han Chinese, the Ming dynasty represented the pinnacle of Han traditions within the imperial era. Through his selective reconstruction of this period, Robert van Gulik sought to present a "pure" vision of Chinese culture—one that was untainted by the later Manchu rule and Western colonial influences. This nostalgic idealization of Han cultural heritage appears in his visual language. In his illustrations, van Gulik meticulously wove together various symbols of Han culture—including hairstyles, clothing, architecture, and objects—into an interconnected visual network that reinforced his constructed image of China. In Judge Dee illustrations, male figures are typically depicted with their hair tied in topknots and wearing *futou* headgear, while female characters are dressed in wide-sleeved robes. He carefully replicated details drawn from Ming dynasty woodblock prints, striving to achieve what he regarded as a "genuine old Chinese style."

Finally, van Gulik's admiration for Ming dynasty culture may also reflect his concerns about the historical circumstances in which he lived. If the Manchu invasion represented a comprehensive disruption of Han culture, van Gulik harbored similar anxieties regarding China under Communist rule, believing that modernization campaigns and political transformations could further erode the traditional Chinese culture he deeply valued. While working in

[90] Robert Hans van Gulik, *The Red Pavilion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 175.

Chongqing, he refused to engage with any Communist officials, including Zhou Enlai 周恩来 (1898–1976).[91] In this context, his veneration of Ming dynasty culture can be seen as an attempt to construct an ideal cultural system in opposition to what he perceived as the decline of Chinese civilization.

The 20th century was a period of immense political and ideological upheaval in China. At the moment when van Gulik first arrived in the country, some Chinese intellectuals were also exploring the relationship between the "Chinese spirit" and the artistic medium of woodblock printing. However, unlike van Gulik's pursuit of an idealized past, they sought to integrate Western techniques to create a vision of modern China. The renowned writer Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881–1936) articulated this perspective in his correspondence:

> As for what constitutes the 'Chinese spirit,' I honestly do not know. In terms of painting, since the Six Dynasties, it has been profoundly influenced by Indian art, making the notion of 'national painting' rather ambiguous. The ink-wash landscape paintings of the Yuan dynasty might be considered a *guocui* 国粹 (national essence), but there is no need to revive them, nor would their revival lead to further development. Therefore, my view is that by incorporating elements from Han dynasty stone engravings, Ming and Qing book illustrations, and the so-called *nianhua* 年画(New Year prints) admired by the common people, while simultaneously drawing from European techniques, it may be possible to create a new and improved form of woodblock printing.[92]

Lu Xun described woodblock printing as "an art form well-suited to modern China," emphasizing its potential as a medium for artistic innovation and social engagement.[93] He organized exhibitions, published journals, and encouraged young artists to study Western printmaking techniques while drawing inspiration from traditional Chinese art. Lu Xun and his

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[91] Barkman, and Van der Hoeven, *Dutch Mandarin: The Life and Work of Robert Hans van Gulik*, 119..

[92] Lu Xun 鲁迅, "1935 nian 2 yue 4 ri zhi Li Hua xin" 1935 年 2 月 4 日致李桦信 [Letter to Li Hua on February 4, 1935], in *Lu Xun shuxin ji* 鲁迅书信集 [Collected Letters of Luxun] (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1976), 746.

[93] Lu Xun 鲁迅, "Muke chuanzuo fa xu" 木刻创作法序 [Preface to The Method of Woodcut Creation], in *Lu Xun quan ji* 鲁迅全集 [Collected writings of Luxun] , vol. 4 (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1981), 609.

contemporaries sought to transform woodblock printing into a powerful means of communication, using it to express social critique and advocate for change, thus initiating the Chinese New Woodcut Movement.[94] During this period, both Chinese intellectuals and Western scholars were actively contemplating and envisioning the future of Chinese culture. The contrast between Robert van Gulik's nostalgic idealization of the past and Lu Xun's pursuit of modernity reflects two distinct cultural positions: the former sought to revive tradition as a means of resisting the cultural rupture brought by modernity, while the latter aimed to forge new cultural pathways through the integration of tradition and modern innovation. Woodblock printing, in this context, became a microcosm of the broader cultural contestation of the time, simultaneously preserving traditional cultural memory and serving as a site for modern artistic experimentation.

[94] Elizabeth Emrich, "Modernity through Experimentation: Lu Xun and the Modern Chinese Woodcut Movement," in *Print, Profit, and Perception. Ideas, Information and Knowledge in Chinese Societies 1895–1949*, 66–90.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Robert van Gulik's Judge Dee series and its illustrations serve as a unique case of 20th-century cross-cultural exchange, showcasing his idealized reconstruction of Chinese culture. Through his novels, he not only constructs a vision of China that aligns with his personal understanding but also reinforces this image on a visual level by drawing inspiration from Ming dynasty woodblock prints. However, this representation is not a mere historical reproduction; instead, it is a selective construction shaped by his cultural stance, the historical context of his time, and cross-cultural influences.

This study first examined how van Gulik engages in cross-cultural adaptation in his illustrations. He extensively referenced Ming dynasty woodblock prints, particularly *Lienü zhuan* and other illustrated works from the Ming and Qing periods. Through tracing, adaptation, omission, and reconfiguration, he created a visual system that merges traditional Chinese artistic elements with Western narrative conventions. In doing so, he not only adopted the linear aesthetics of Chinese prints but also incorporated Western artistic techniques such as spatial perspective, compositional structure, and chiaroscuro to accommodate the visual expectations of Western readers better. This fusion of styles yields illustrations that simultaneously evoke the imagery of "old China" while aligning with modern printing and reading practices, thereby forming a distinctive mode of cross-cultural artistic expression.

Furthermore, this study analyzed how van Gulik constructed his idealized vision of China through his gender politics. In shaping the character of Judge Dee, not only does he imbue him with the virtues of a traditional Confucian scholar-official but also integrates elements of Western detective fiction, to enhance the construction of masculinity. His depictions of female figures

similarly reflect an idealized binary opposition; on one hand, the virtuous and understanding wife, embodying Confucian family ethics, yet on the other, the abundance of nude women, positioned as visual focal points following European artistic traditions. These depictions of "Oriental women" do not reflect the lived realities of Chinese women; rather, they differ significantly from the ways in which women were portrayed in authentic Ming dynasty erotic paintings and illustrated fiction. Instead, they project a false fantasy shaped by Western erotic conventions and orientalist visual perspectives. While van Gulik's works undoubtedly facilitated the transmission of Chinese culture to the West, they also perpetuated and reinforced stereotypical and exoticized perceptions of Chinese women. In this sense, van Gulik's vision of China participates in a more extended history of Western representations that aestheticize and eroticize the East.

Modern Western intellectuals often turned to the East in search of direction, seeking philosophy, exotic religions, ancient wisdom, and harmonious social structures to reshape their understanding of themselves.[95] Van Gulik was undoubtedly one of the most gifted sinologists of the 20th century, and in his works, he selectively reconstructed Ming dynasty culture he revered, along with idealized notions of masculinity and femininity, while filtering them through a Western perspective. In doing so, he created a vision of Chinese culture that was both idealized and selectively revised. His Judge Dee series thus presents an "ancient China" tailored to Western aesthetic and narrative conventions while simultaneously reflecting his personal cultural ideals and scholarly aspirations. By examining his illustrations, this study offers deeper insights into the migration of artistic styles in cross-cultural exchanges, the construction of cultural imagery, and the intricate relationship between personal identity and historical transformation.

[95] Rocha, "Scientia Sexualis versus Ars Erotica: Foucault, van Gulik, Needham," 334.

APPENDIX A

FIGURES

Fig. 1. “Judge Dee on the Ramparts of Lang-Fang” signed by Robert van Gulik, from *The Chinese Maze Murders*.
Robert van Gulik, *The Chinese Maze Murders: A Chinese Detective Story Suggested by Three Original Ancient Chinese Plots* (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 293.

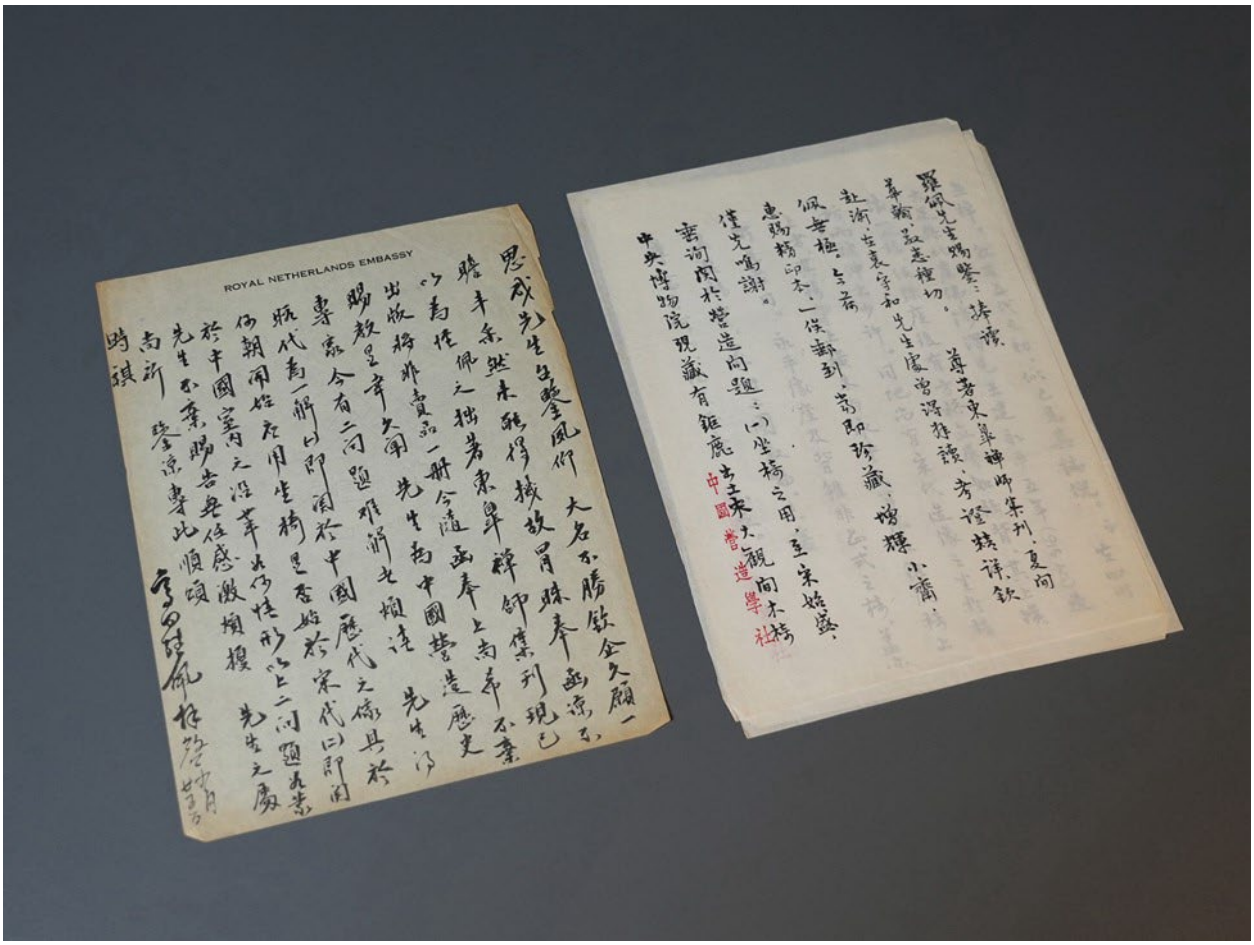

Fig. 2. Correspondence between Robert van Gulik (left) and Chinese architectural historian Liang Sicheng 梁思成(1901–1972) (right).

https://www.library.universiteitleiden.nl/news/2023/05/donation-of-personal-archive-and-collection-of-leiden-sinologist-robert-van-gulik.

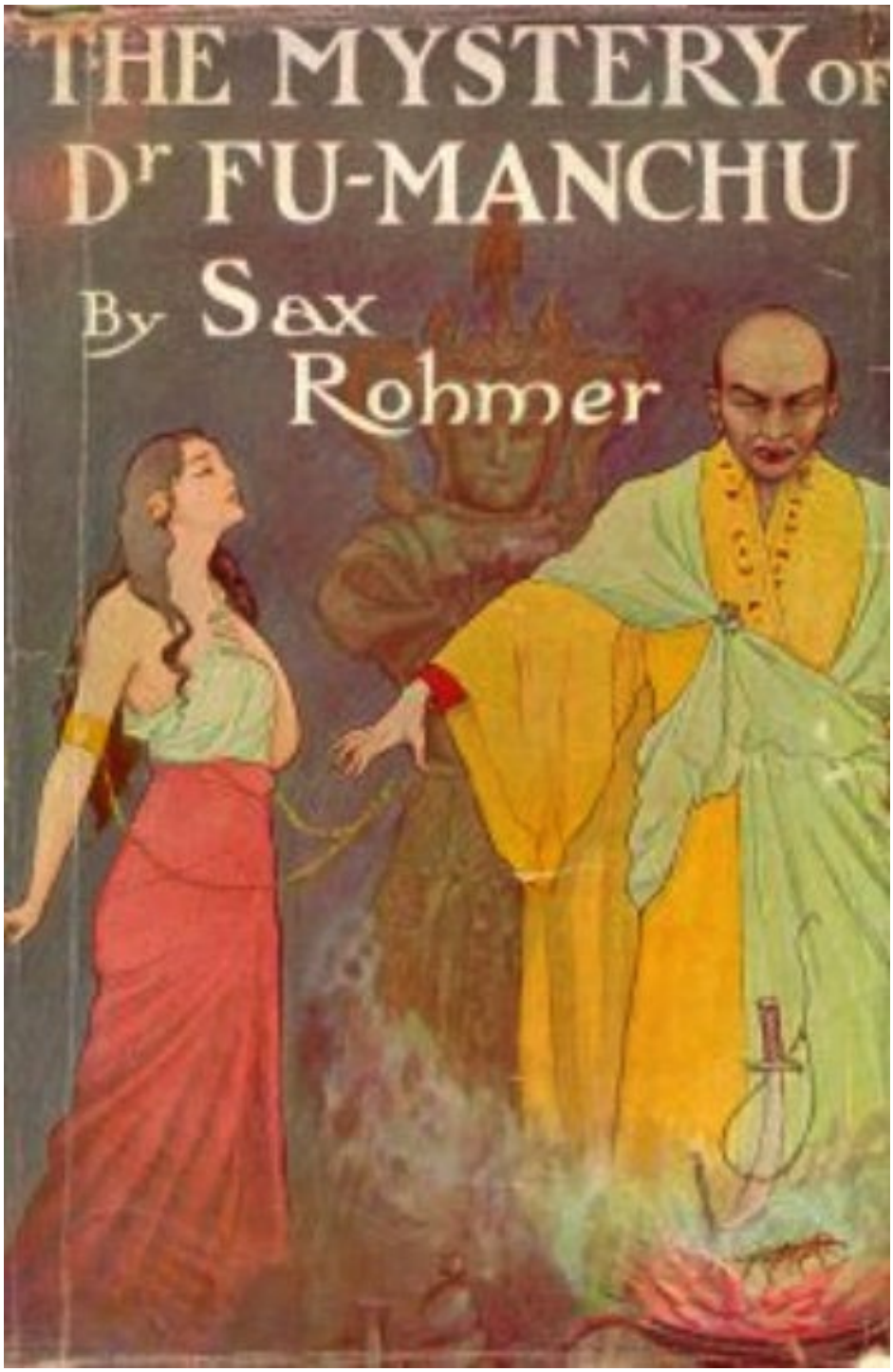

Fig. 3. *The Mystery of Dr. Fu-Manchu* cover, 1913. https://zh.wikipedia.org/zh-hans/傅满洲#/media/File:The_Mystery_of_Dr._Fu-Manchu_cover_1913.jpg.

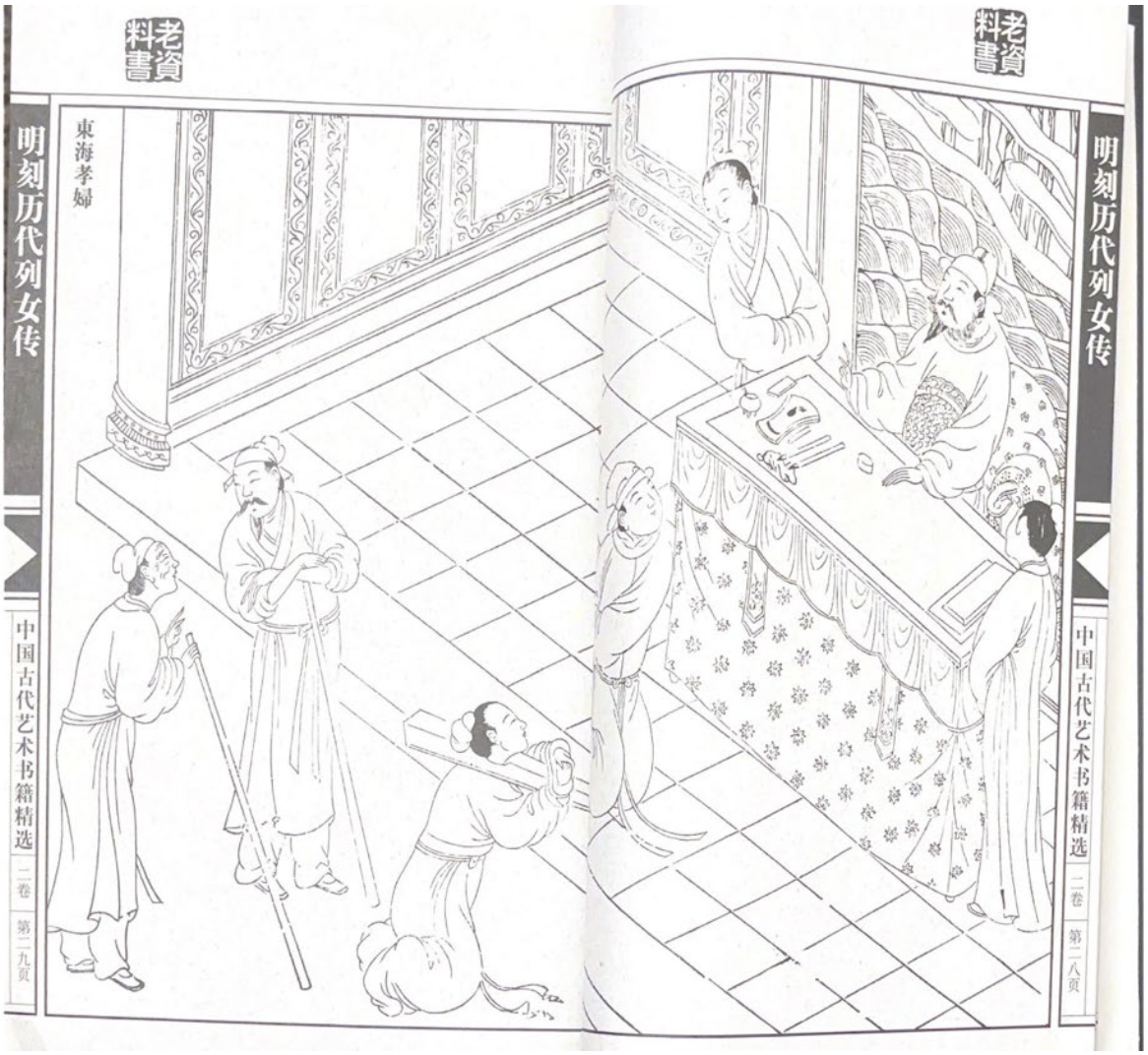

Fig. 4. “Donghai xiaofu”东海孝妇 in *Lienü zhuan*.
Liu Xiang and Qiu Ying, *Ming ke li dai Lie nü zhuan: Qiu Shizhou hui tu zhen ji* (Tianjin: Tianjin ren min mei shu chu ban she, 2004), vol. 2, 28–29.

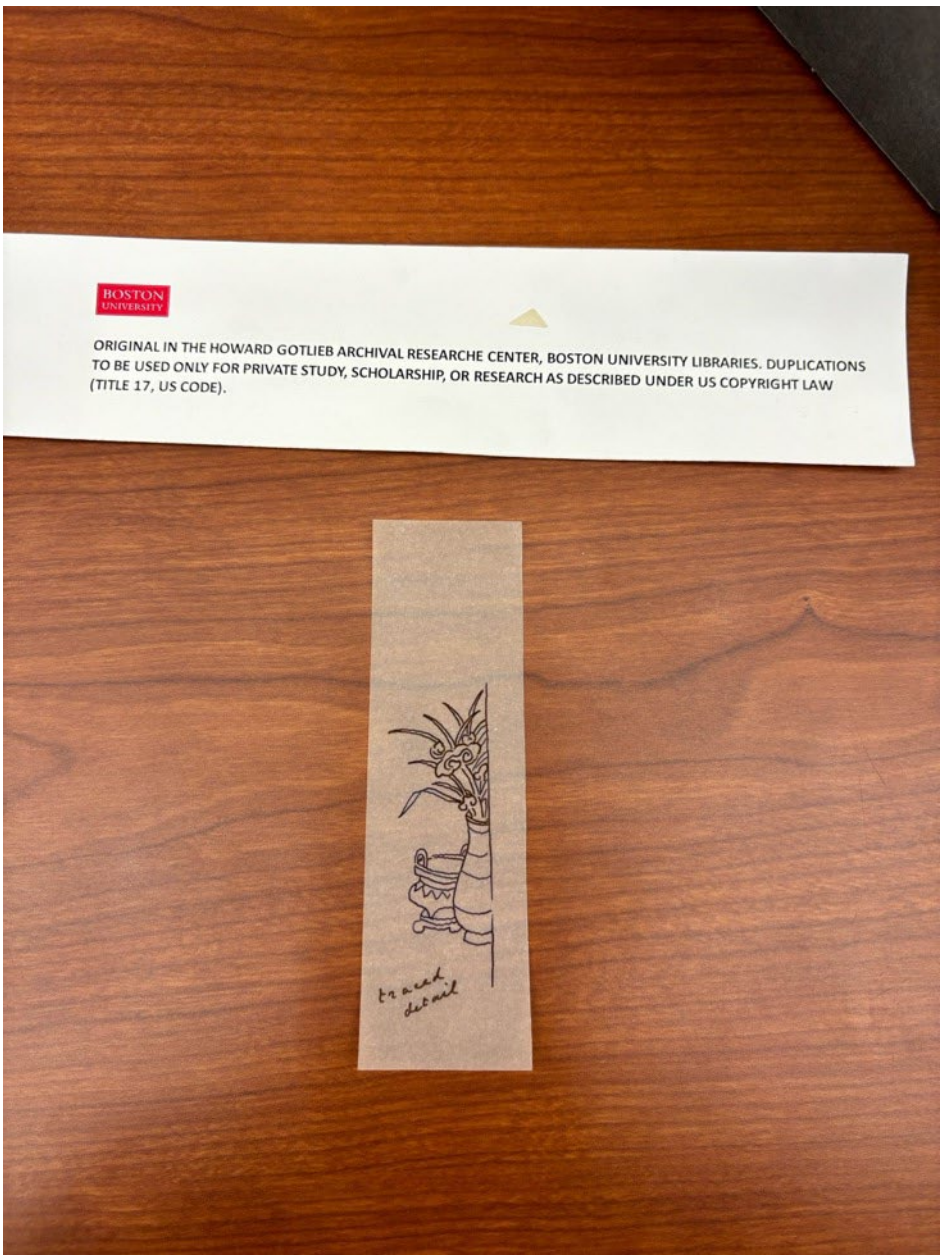

Fig. 5. Pen sketch of furniture for Judge Dee stories.
Author's photograph of van Gulik's sketch, Box 2, Robert Hans van Gulik Collection #358, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University.

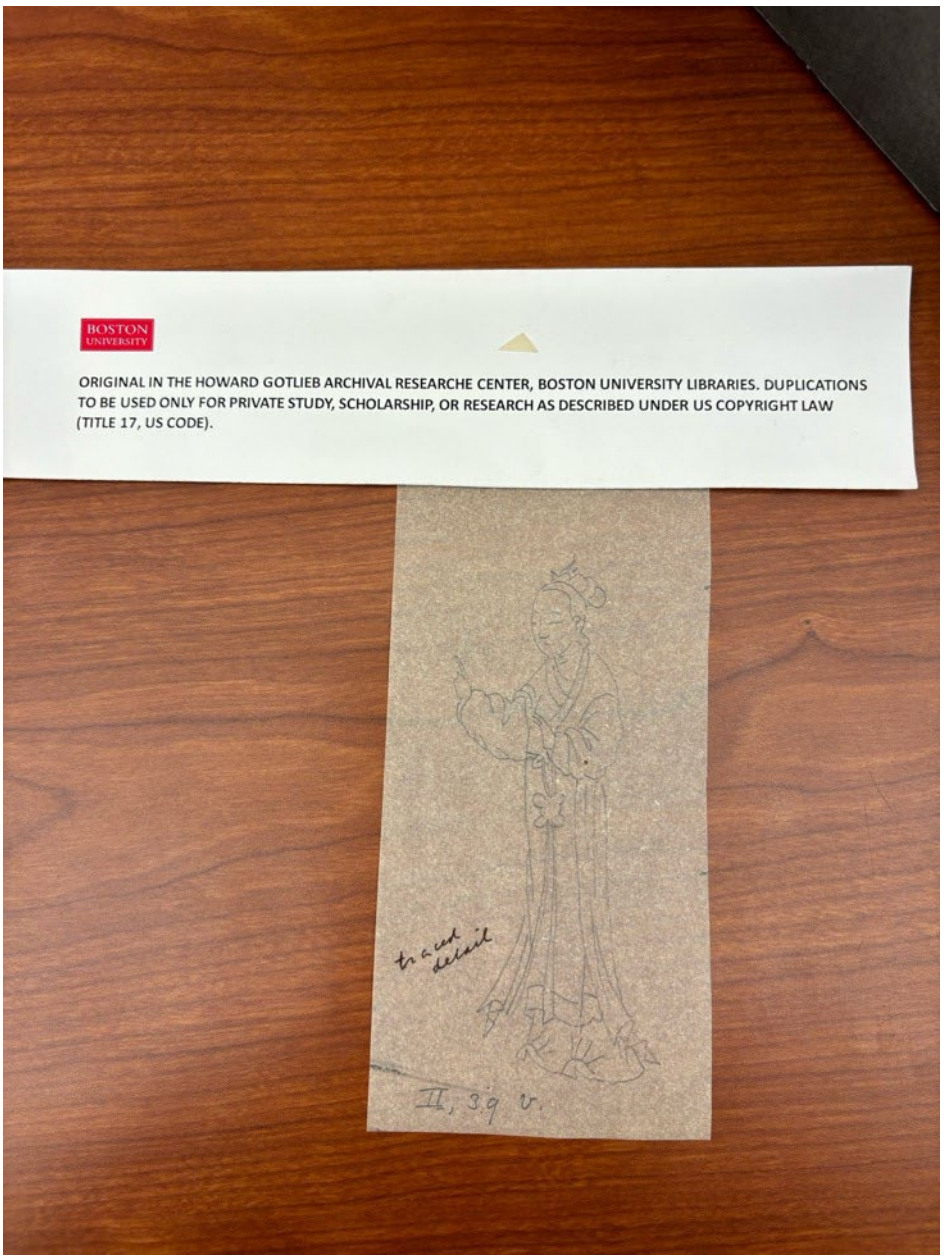

Fig. 6. Pencil sketch of a figure for Judge Dee stories.
Author's photograph of van Gulik's sketch, Box 2, Robert Hans van Gulik Collection #358, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University.

Fig. 7. Pencil sketch for *The Chinese Nail Murders*.
Author's photograph of van Gulik's sketch, Box 2, Robert Hans van Gulik Collection #358, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University.

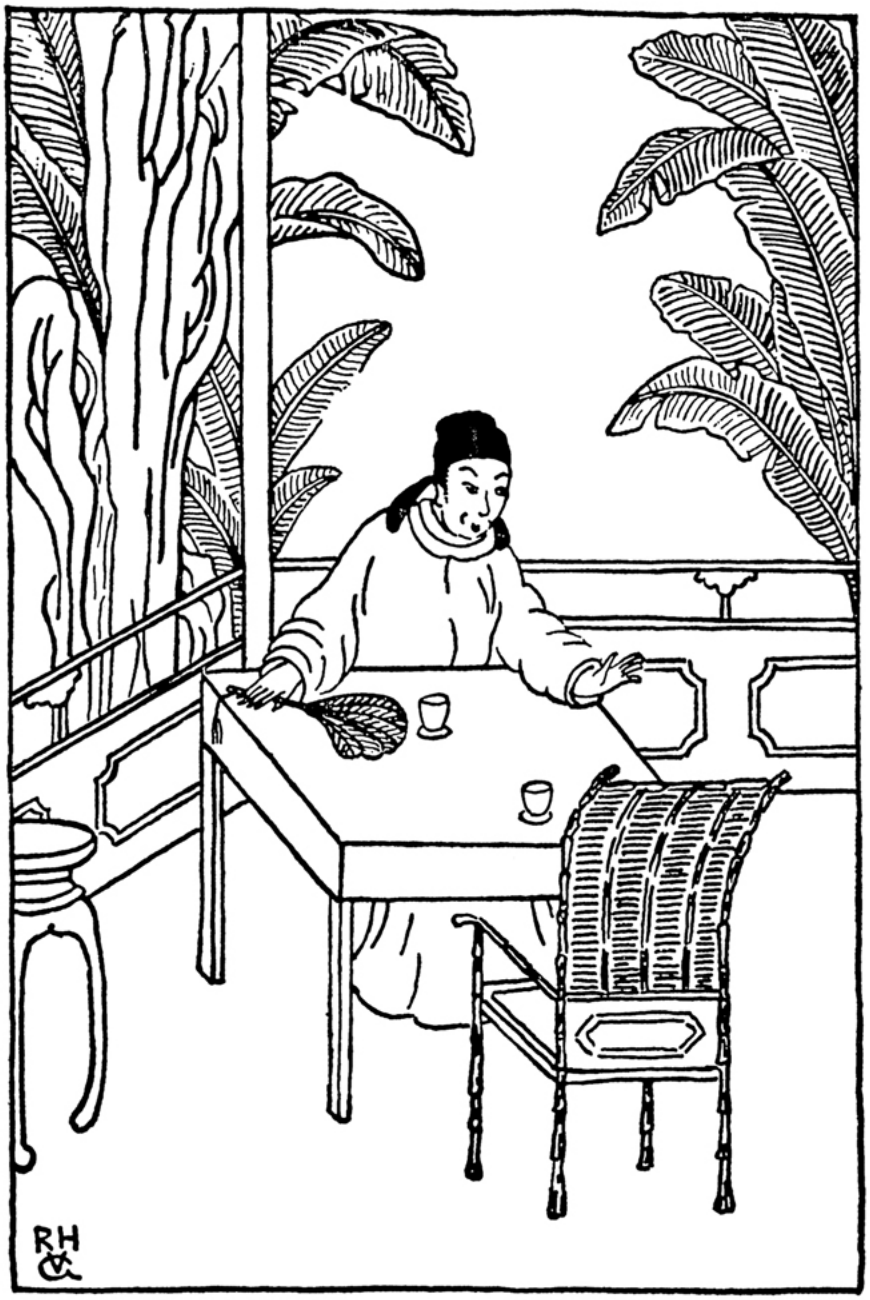

Fig. 8. “A Meeting in a Garden Pavilion” in *The Chinese Nail Murders*.
Robert van Gulik, *The Chinese Nail Murders* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 19.

Fig. 9. An illustration of interrogation scene from *The Chinese Gold Murders*.
Robert Hans van Gulik, *The Chinese Gold Murders: A Judge Dee Detective Story* (New York: Perennial, 2004), 72.

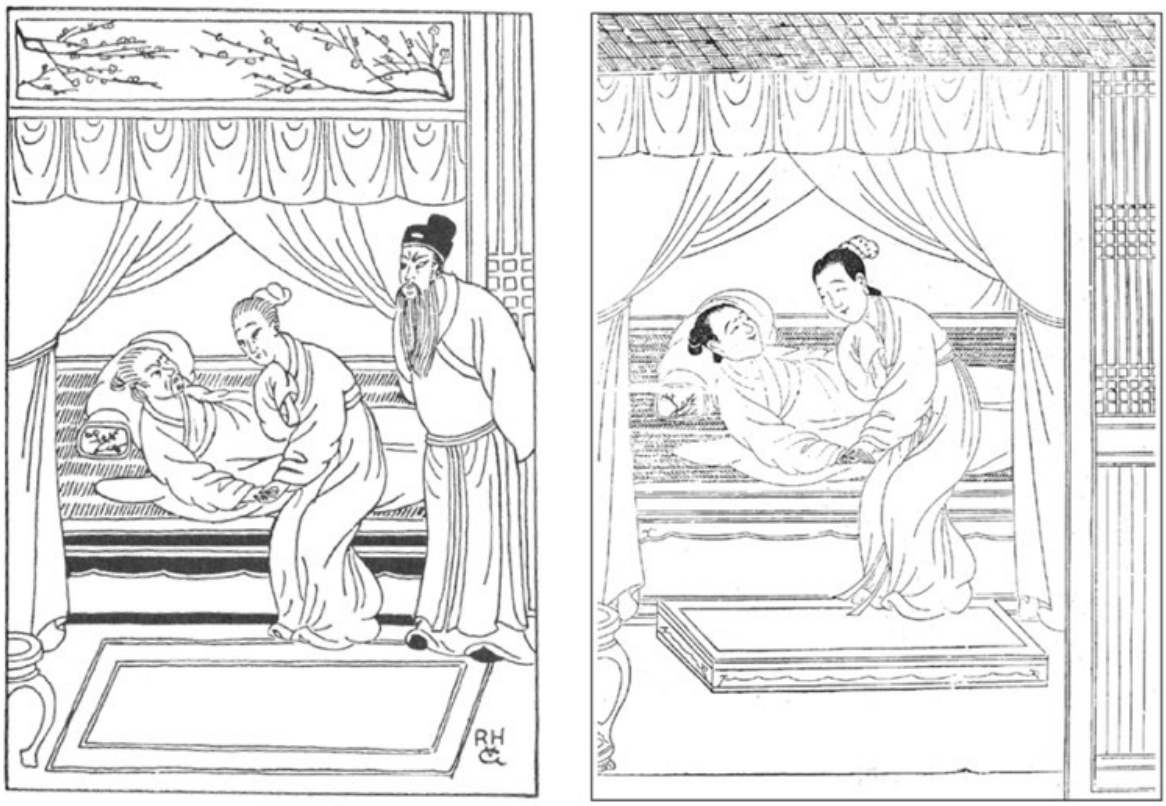

Fig. 10. Contrast of bedroom scenes. Left: from van Gulik's *The Chinese Gold Murders*. Right: from *Lienü zhuan*.
Images from Hisashi Shibusawa 澁澤尚, "ロバート・ハンス・ファン・ヒューリック『ディー判事もの』の挿絵について: 高羅佩狄奇案插圖來源攷" [On Illustrations of "The Judge Dee Stories" by Robert Hans van Gulik], 福島大学人間発達文化学類論集 21 (2015): 59.

Fig. 11. Contrast of courtyard scenes. Left: from van Gulik's *Poets and the Murder*. Right: *from Lienü zhuan*.
Images from Hisashi Shibusawa, "ロバート・ハンス・ファン・ヒューリック『ディー判事もの』の挿絵について: 高羅佩狄奇案插圖來源攷," 59.

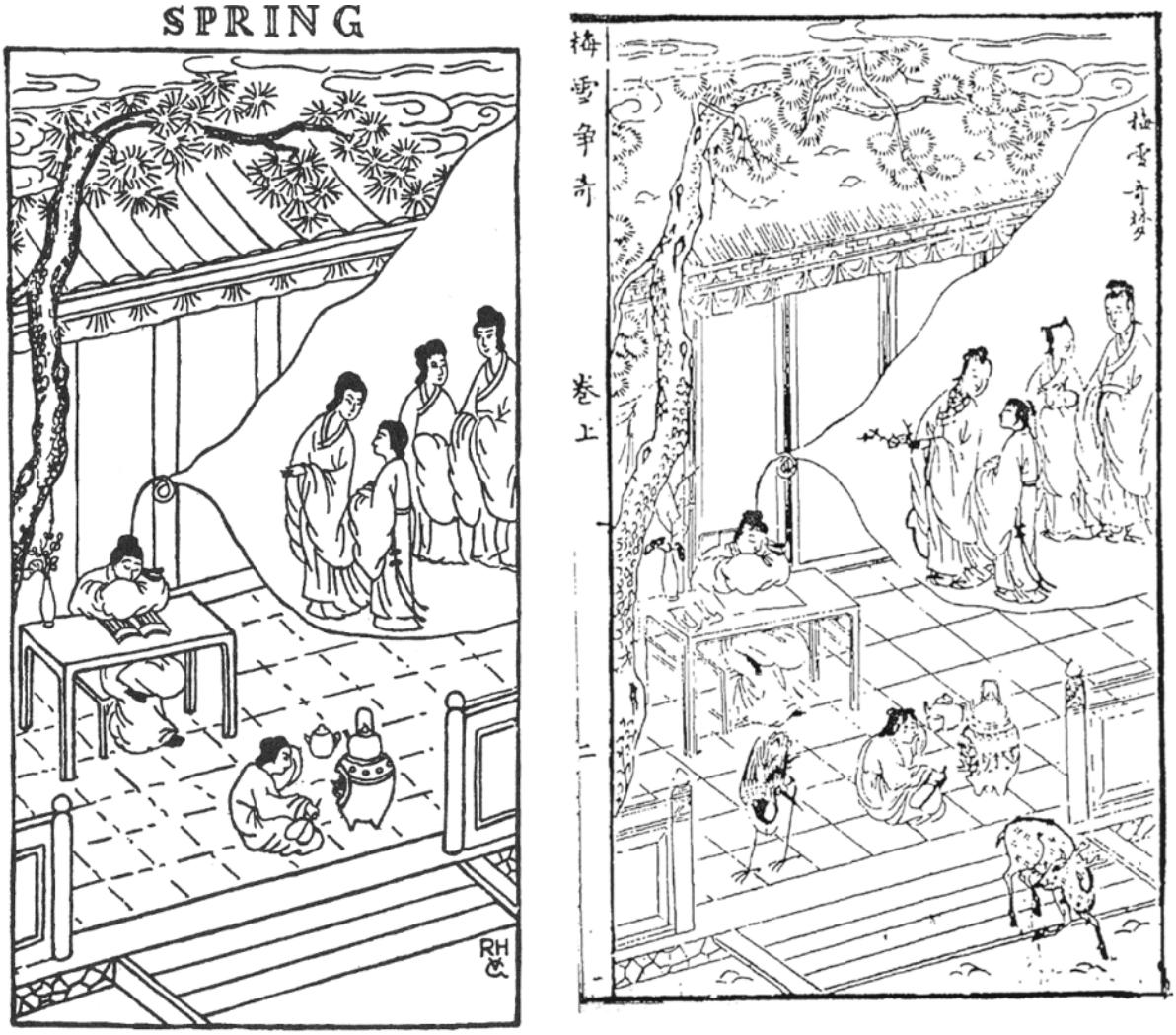

Fig. 12. Contrast of dream scenes. Left: from van Gulik's *The Lacquer Screen*. Right: from *Mei xue zheng qi* 梅雪争奇, a 17th century book by Deng Zhimo 邓志谟.
Images from Hisashi Shibusawa, "ロバート・ハンス・ファン・ヒューリック『ディー判事もの』の挿絵について: 高羅佩狄奇案插圖來源攷," 65.

Fig. 13. An illustration from Chen Hongshou's *Xi Xiang Ji*.
Illustration from Zhang shenzhi's 张深之 edition of *Xi Xiang Ji,* written by Wang Shifu 王实甫, illustrated by Chen Hongshou, woodblock-printed edition published in 1639.
https://theme.npm.edu.tw/exh113/storytelling/ch/page-4-2.html#lg=1&slide=9.

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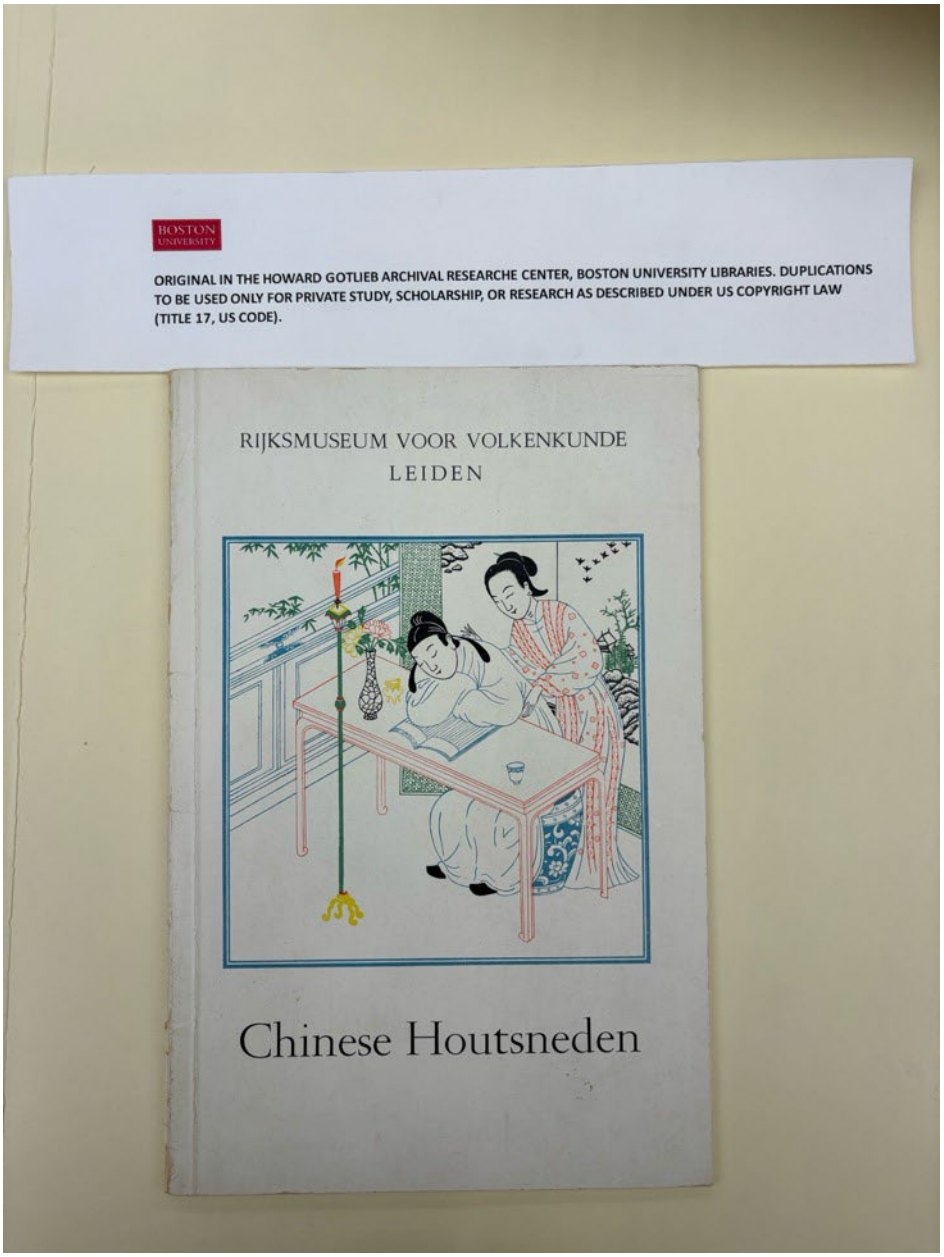

Fig. 14. *Chinese Houtsneden* cover.
Author's photograph, Box 2, Robert Hans van Gulik Collection #358, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University.

Fig. 15. “The Judge and Hoong Make a Discovery” in *The Emperor’s Pearl*.
Robert Hans van Gulik, *The Emperor’s Pearl: A Judge Dee Mystery* (University of Chicago Press, 1994), 81.

Fig. 16. *Yueye Kanchao Tu* 月夜看潮图 (Watching the Tide at Night).
Li Song 李嵩 (1166–1243), ink and color on silk, 22.3x22cm. The National Palace Museum, Taipei. https://digitalarchive.npm.gov.tw/Collection/Detail/14533?dep=P.

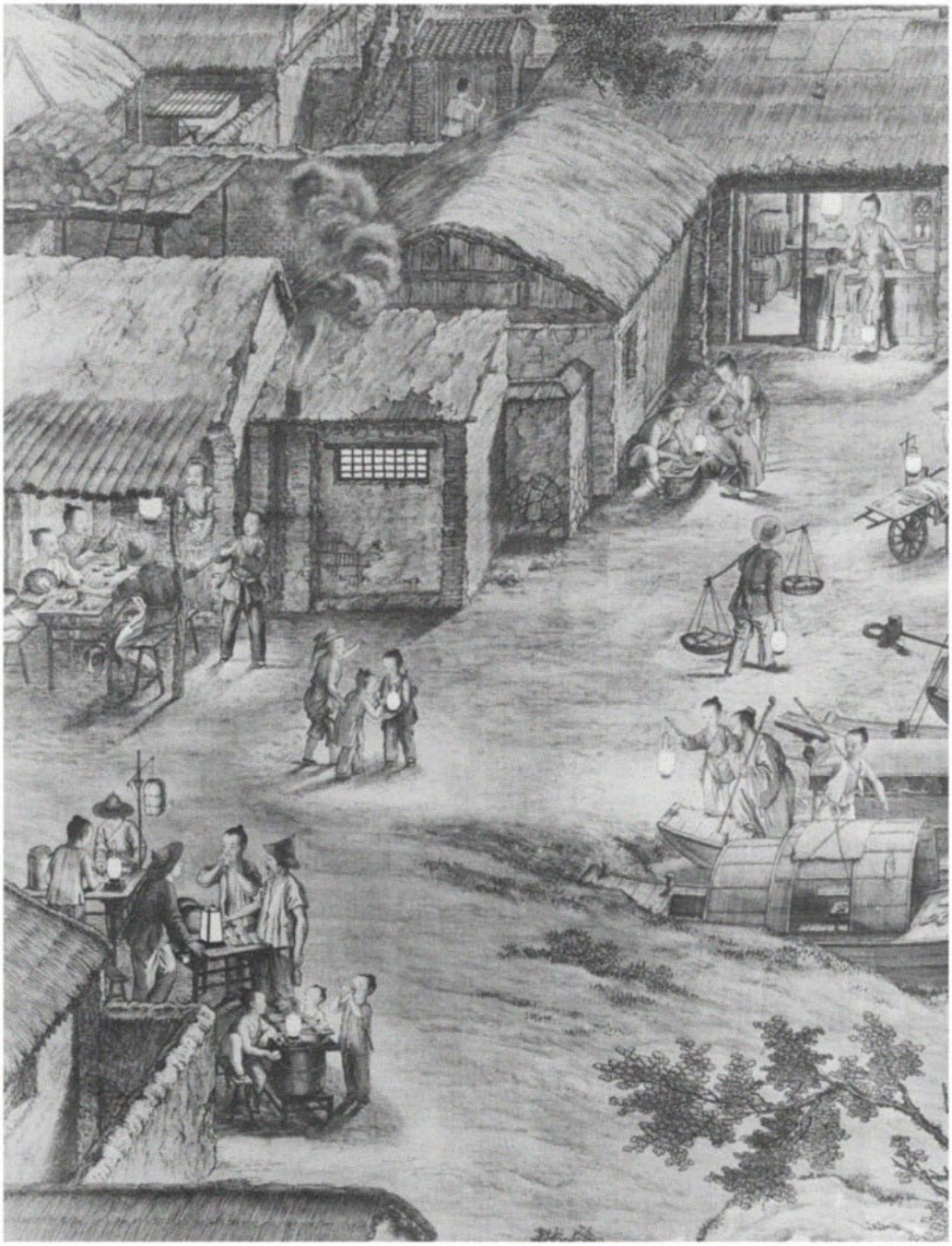

Fig. 17. *Yangcheng Yeshi Tu* 羊城夜市图 (Night Market in Guangzhou). Attributed to Giuseppe Castiglione. Hanging scroll on silk. Dated 1736. Detail.
Image from Michael Sullivan, *The Meeting of Eastern and Western Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 73.

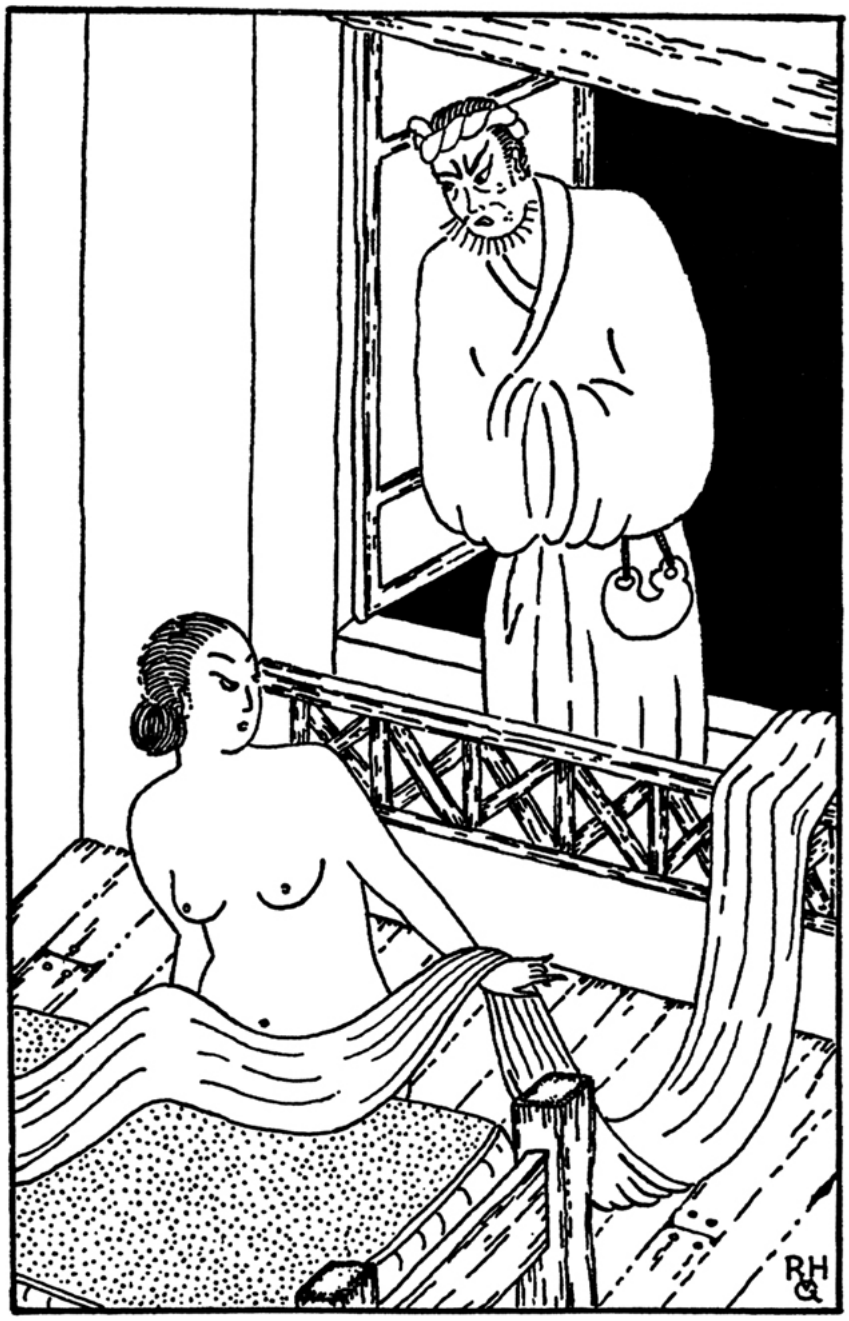

Fig. 18. “An Unexpected Visitor Suprises Pure Jade” in *The Chinese Bell Murders*.
Robert Hans van Gulik, *The Chinese Bell Murders* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 139.

Fig. 19. “A Weird Discovery Under a Bell” in *The Chinese Bell Murders*.
Robert Hans van Gulik, *The Chinese Bell Murders* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 223.

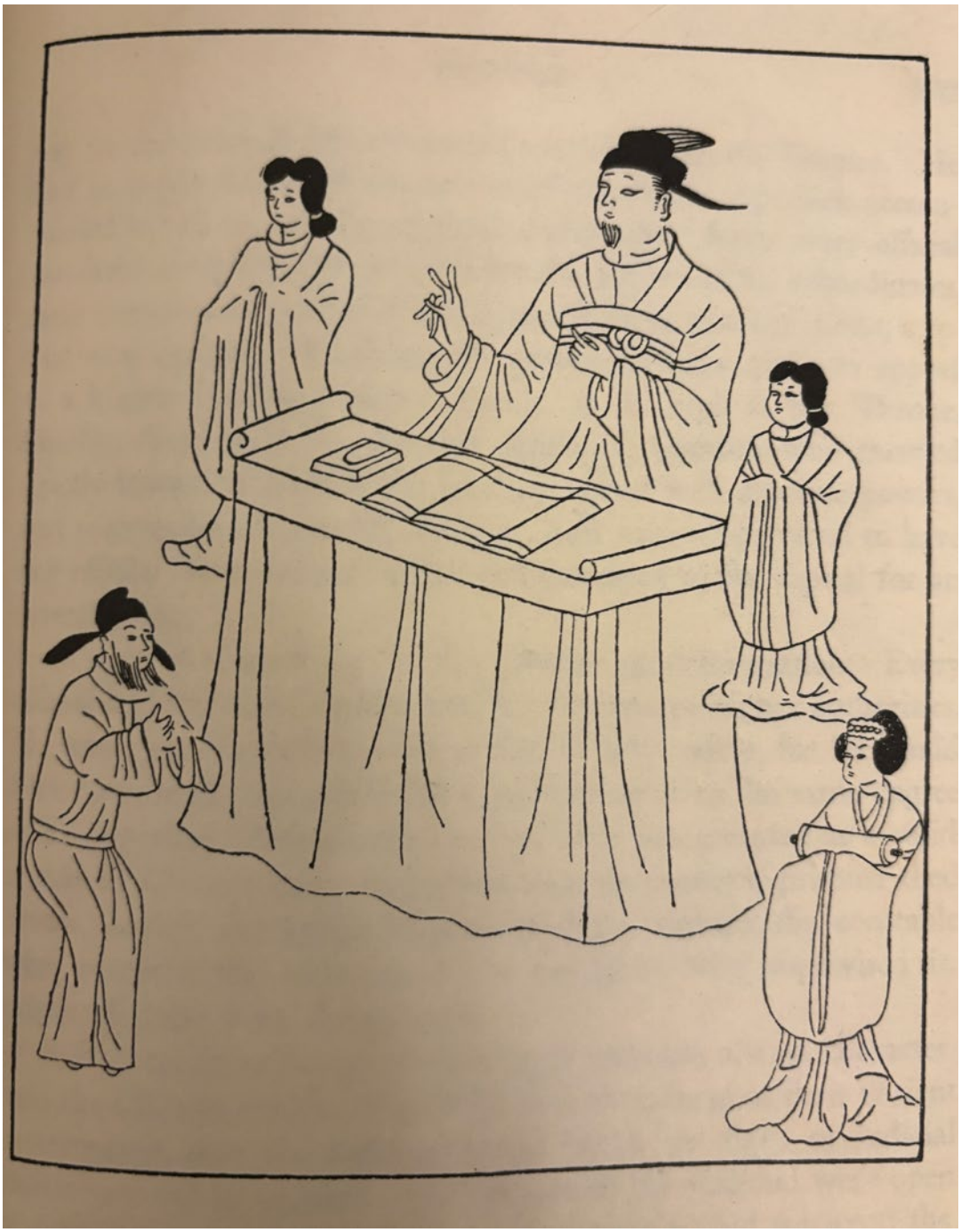

Fig. 20. “One of the Ten Judges of Hall” in *Dee Goong An*.
Robert Hans van Gulik, trans, *Celebrated Cases of Judge Dee = Dee Goong an: An Authentic Eighteenth-Century Chinese Detective Novel* (New York: Dover Publications, 1976), xx.

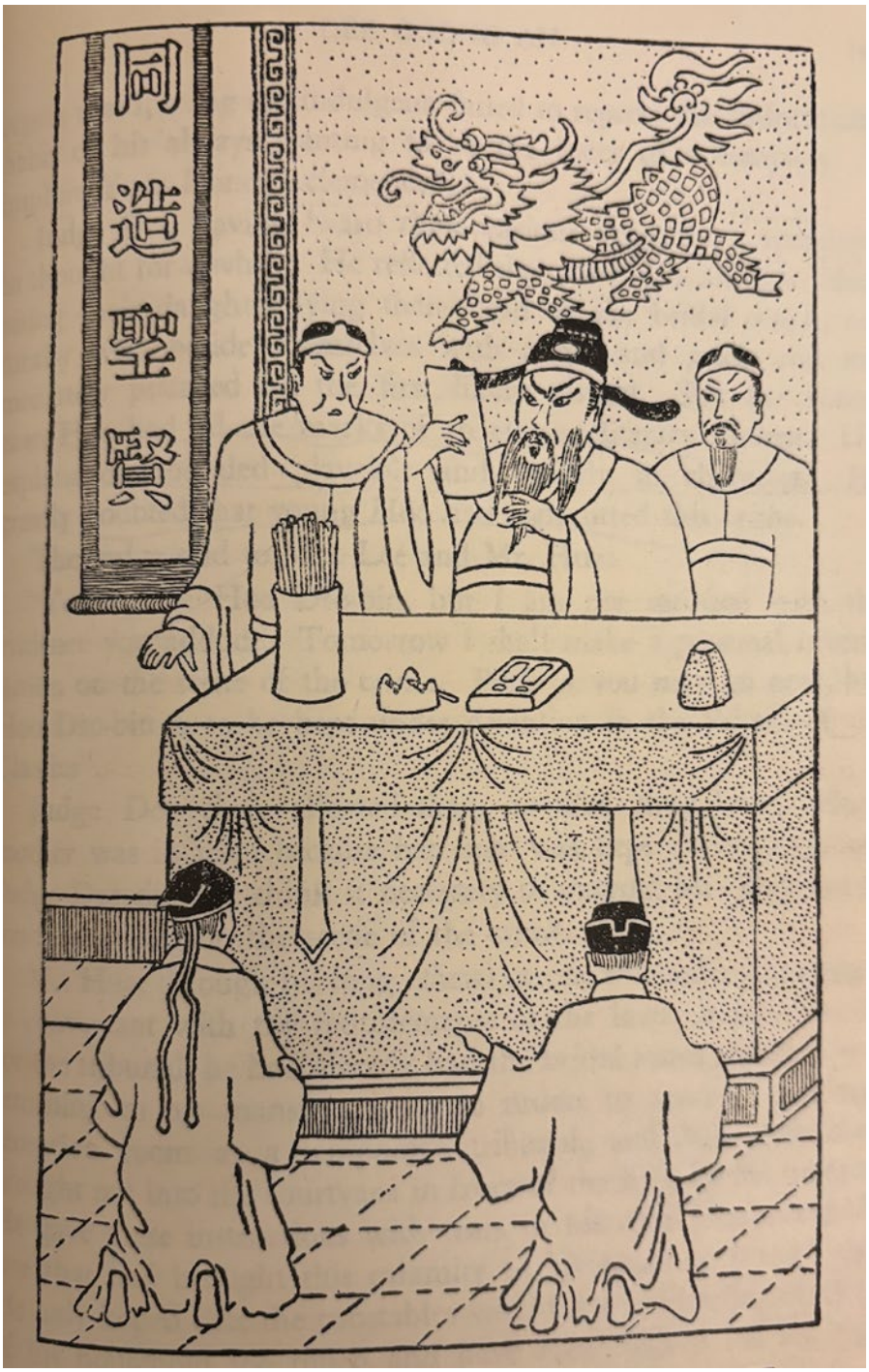

Fig. 21. “Judge Dee’s First Hearing of the Case Lee Hua vs. Hoo” in *Dee Goong An*. Van Gulik, *Celebrated Cases of Judge Dee*, 116.

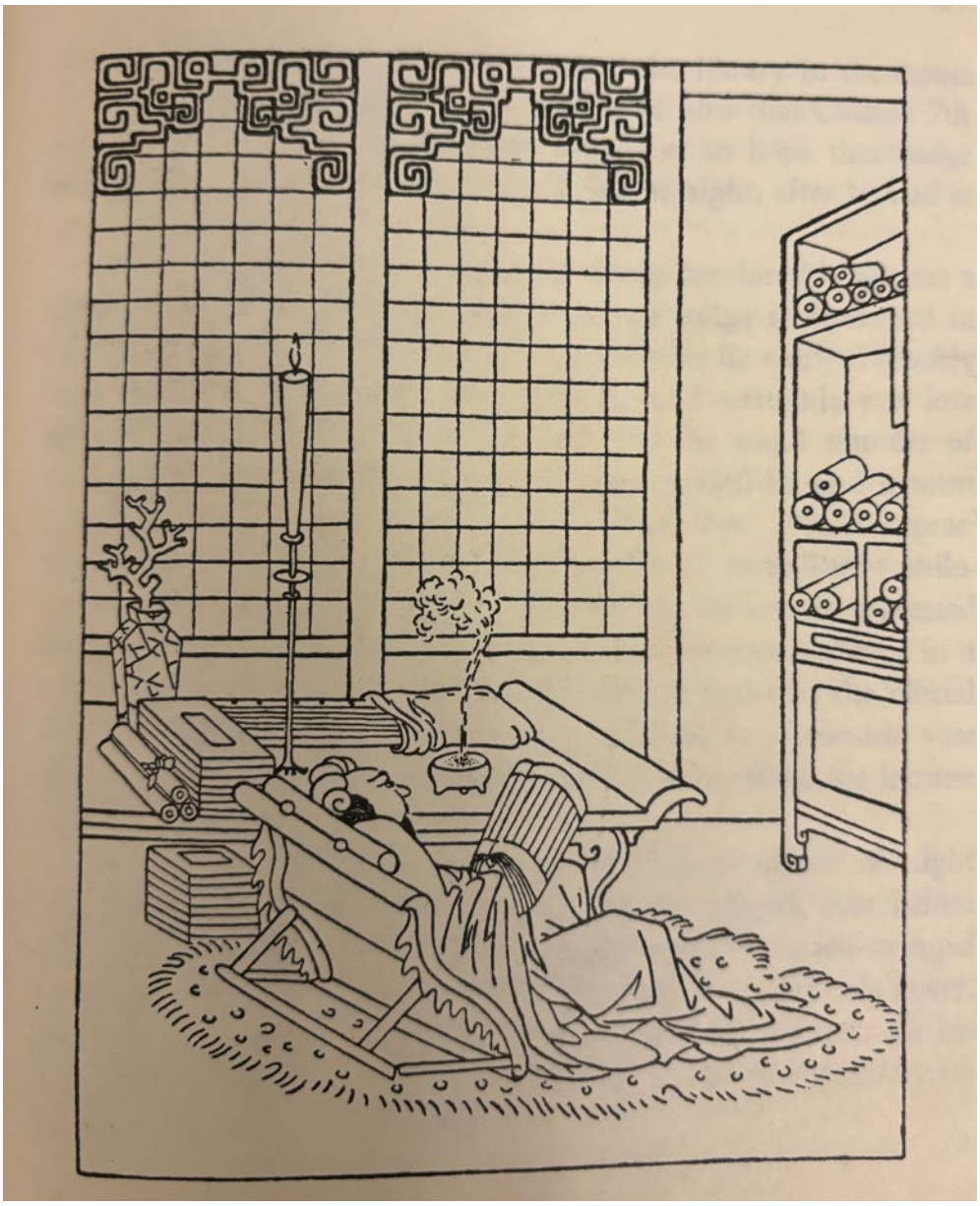

Fig. 22. “Judge Dee Reading in His Library” in *Dee Goong An*.
Van Gulik, *Celebrated Cases of Judge Dee*, xiv.

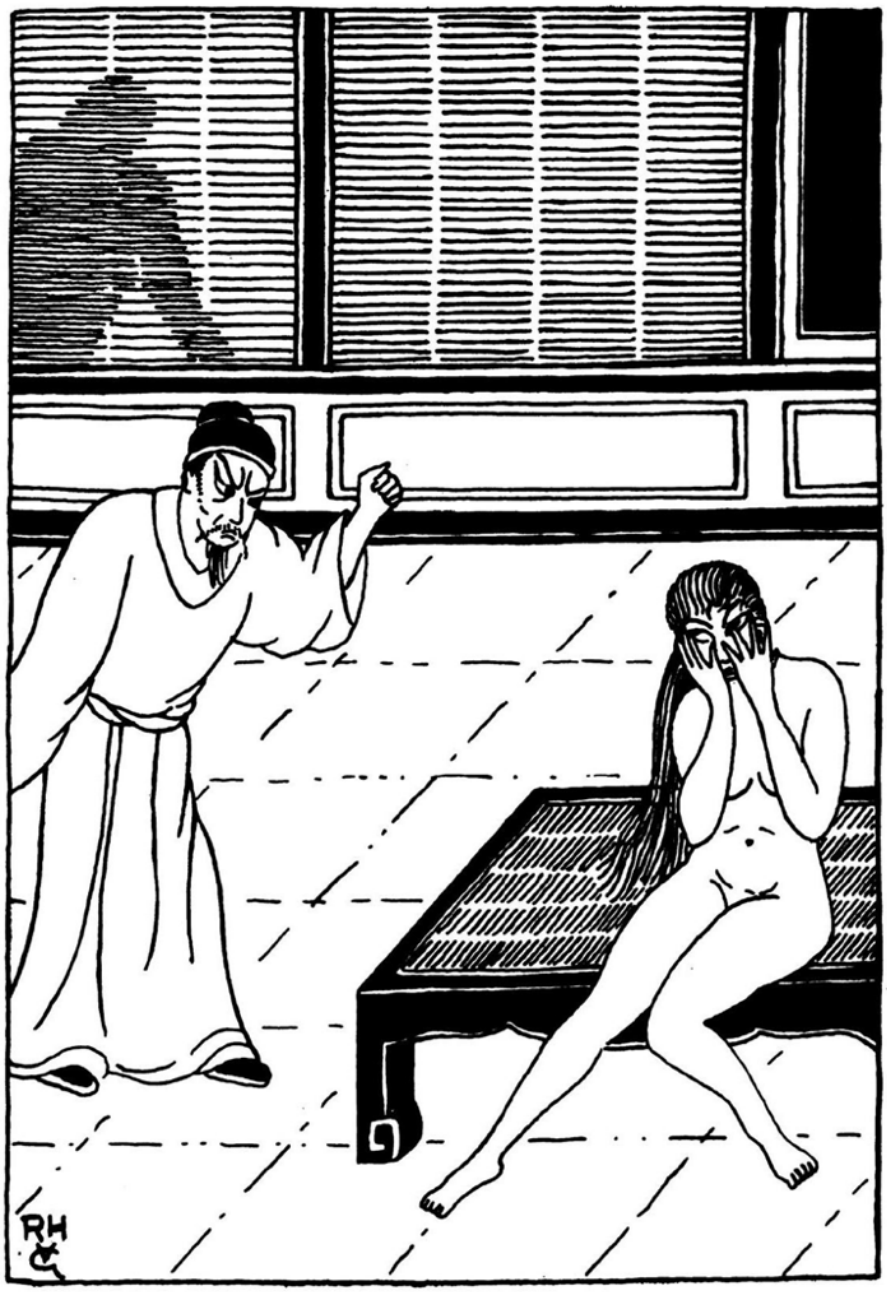

Fig. 23. “A Cruel Tyrant and His Victim” in *The Willow Pattern*.
Robert Hans van Gulik, *The Willow Pattern: A Judge Dee Detective Story* (New York: Warner, 1974), 125.

Fig. 24. “A Meeting in a Dark Street” in *The Willow Pattern*.
Van Gulik, *The Willow Pattern: A Judge Dee Detective Story*, 19.

Fig. 25. “Judge Dee in the Shrine of the Black Fox” in *Poets and Murder*.
Robert Hans van Gulik, *Poets and Murder* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 73.

Fig. 26. “Ma Joong Saves a Drowning Girl” in *The Willow Pattern*.
Van Gulik, *The Willow Pattern: A Judge Dee Detective Story*, 84.

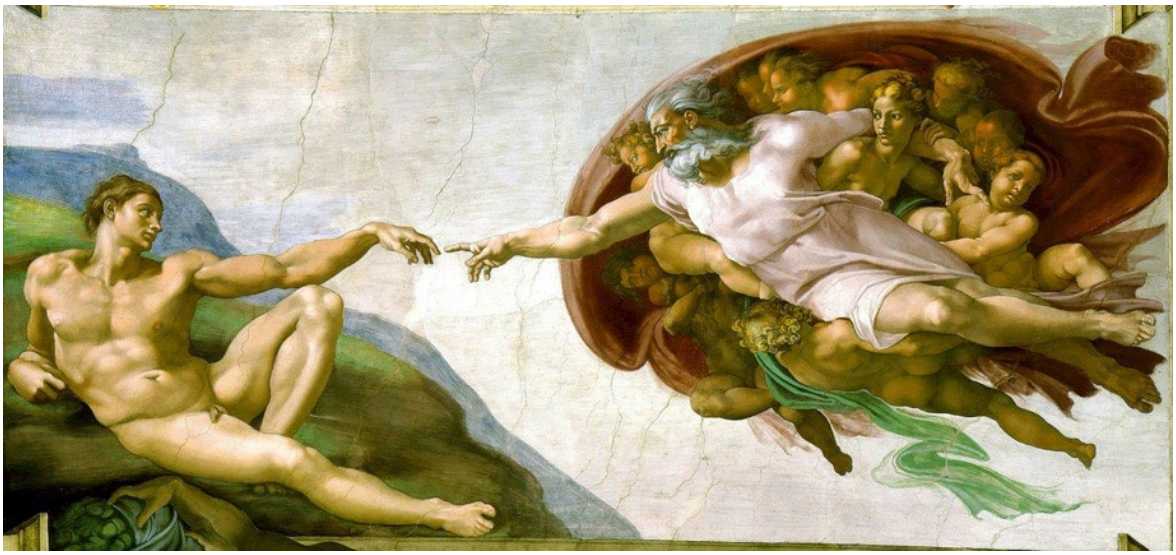

Fig. 27. *The Creation of Adam*. Michelangelo. Ca. 1511. 280x570cm. Sistine Chapel’s ceiling, Vatican City.
https://www.thesistinechapel.org/the-creation-of-adam.

Fig. 28. A portrait of Judge Dee in *The Chinese Nail Murders*.
Robert Hans van Gulik, *The Chinese Nail Murders: Judge Dee's Last Three Cases: A Chinese Detective Story Suggested by Original Ancient Chinese Plots* (London: Joseph, 1961), 210.

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Fig. 29. “He Pulled the Silk Strings in Succession” in *The Monkey and the Tiger*.
Robert Hans van Gulik, *The Monkey and the Tiger: Two Chinese Detective Stories* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 113.

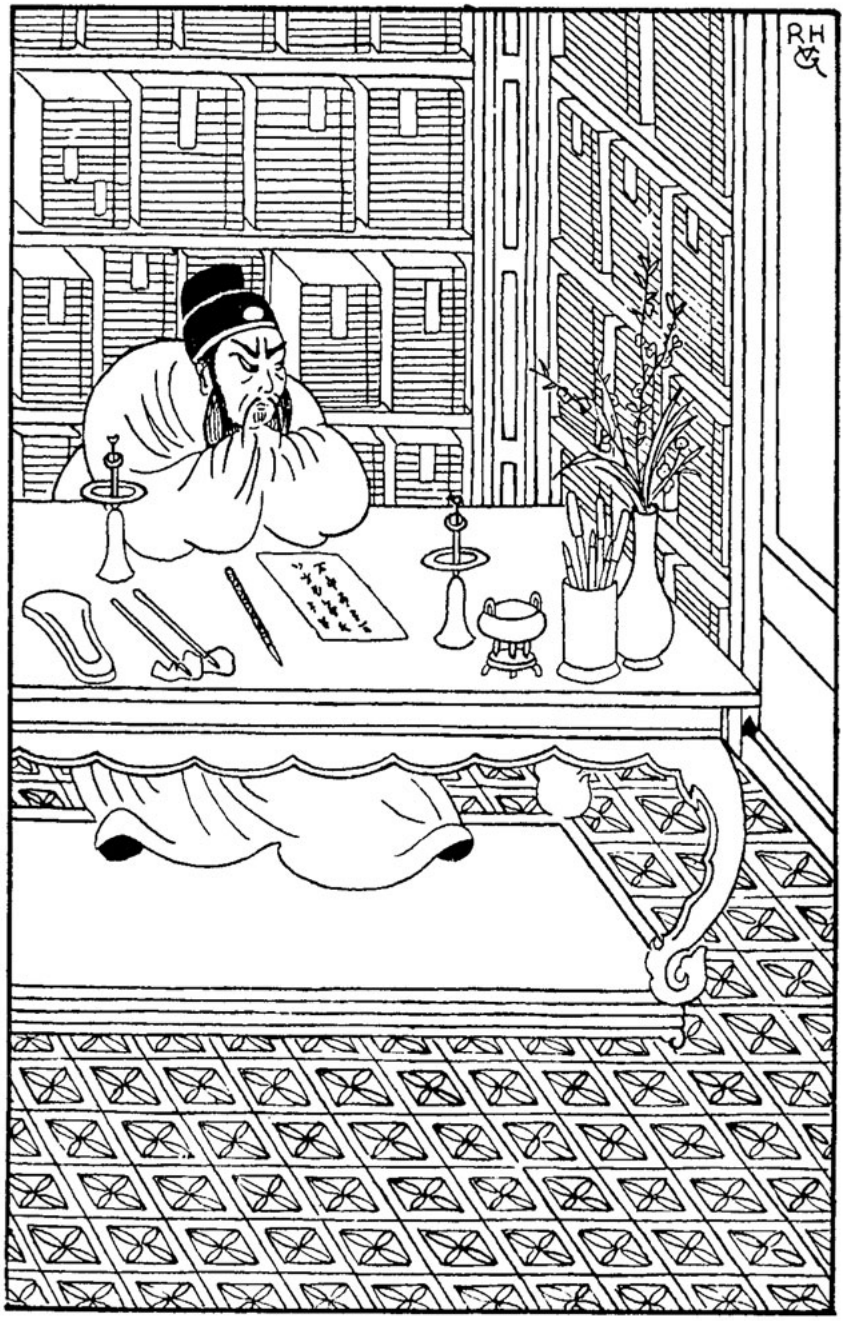

Fig. 30. “Judge Dee in General Ding’s library” in *The Chinese Maze Murders*.
Van Gulik, *The Chinese Maze Murders*, 93.

Fig. 31. Ye Shimeng's portrait. Robert van Gulik. State Museum of Ethnology, Leiden. https://silkqin.com/10ideo/vgulik.htm.

Fig. 32. “A Sword Duel on the Highway” in *The Chinese Gold Murders*.
Van Gulik, *The Chinese Gold Murders: A Judge Dee Detective Story*, 11.

Fig. 33. First published edition (Japanese) of *The Chinese Maze Murders*, 1951.
Image from "Van Gulik Gao Luopei 高羅佩. De sinoloog Robert Hans van Gulik in wetenschapen kunst" (The Sinologist Robert Hans van Gulik in Scholarship and Art), digital collection, Leiden University Libraries, https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl/view/item/1843484?solr_nav%5Bid%5D=7c7c97a9064c58d97bfc&solr_nav%5Bpage%5D=1&solr_nav%5Boffset%5D=0, pdf page 97.

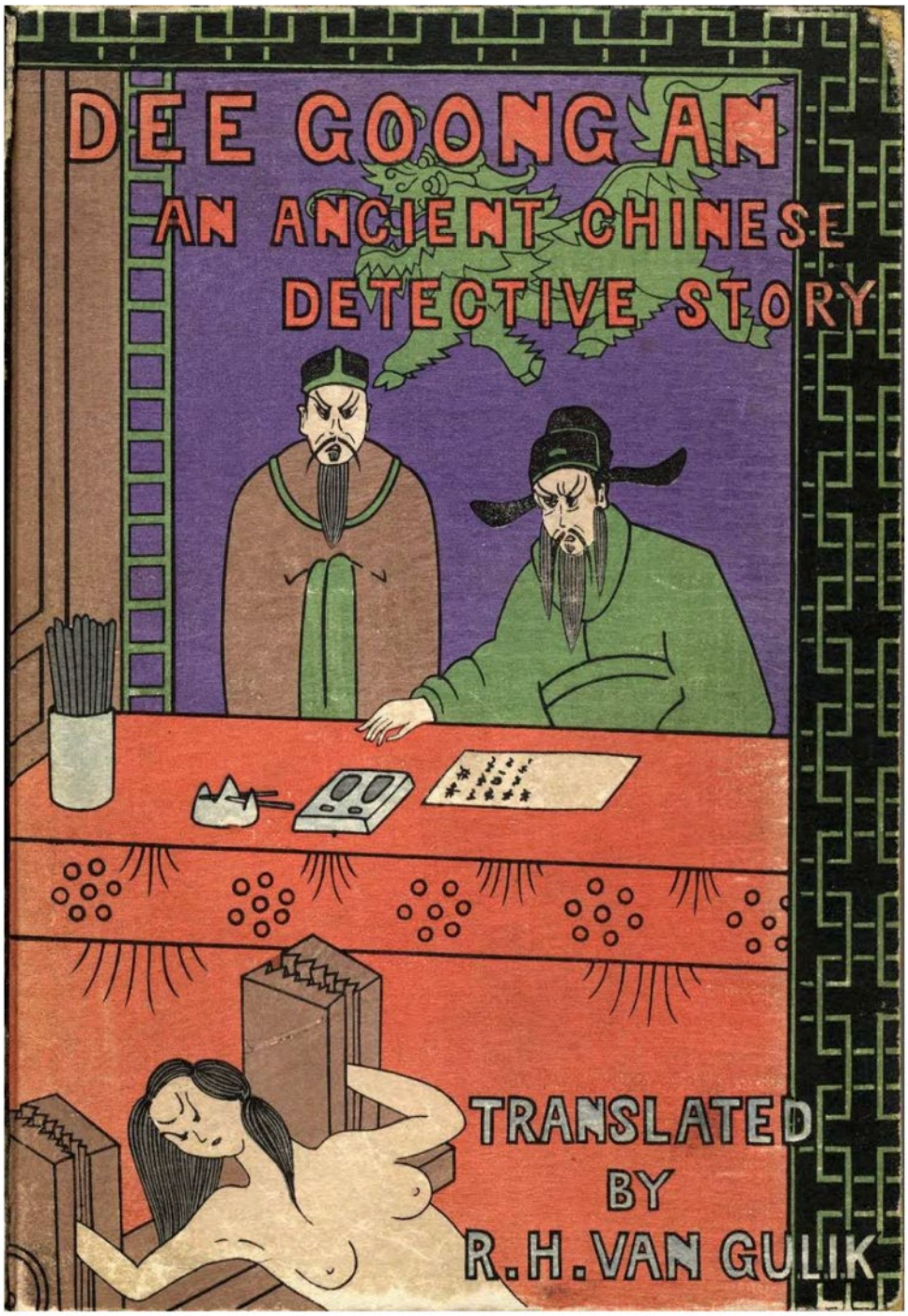

Fig. 34. The *Dee Goong An* cover 1949.
Image from "Van Gulik Gao Luopei 高羅佩. De sinoloog Robert Hans van Gulik in wetenschapen kunst," pdf page 87.

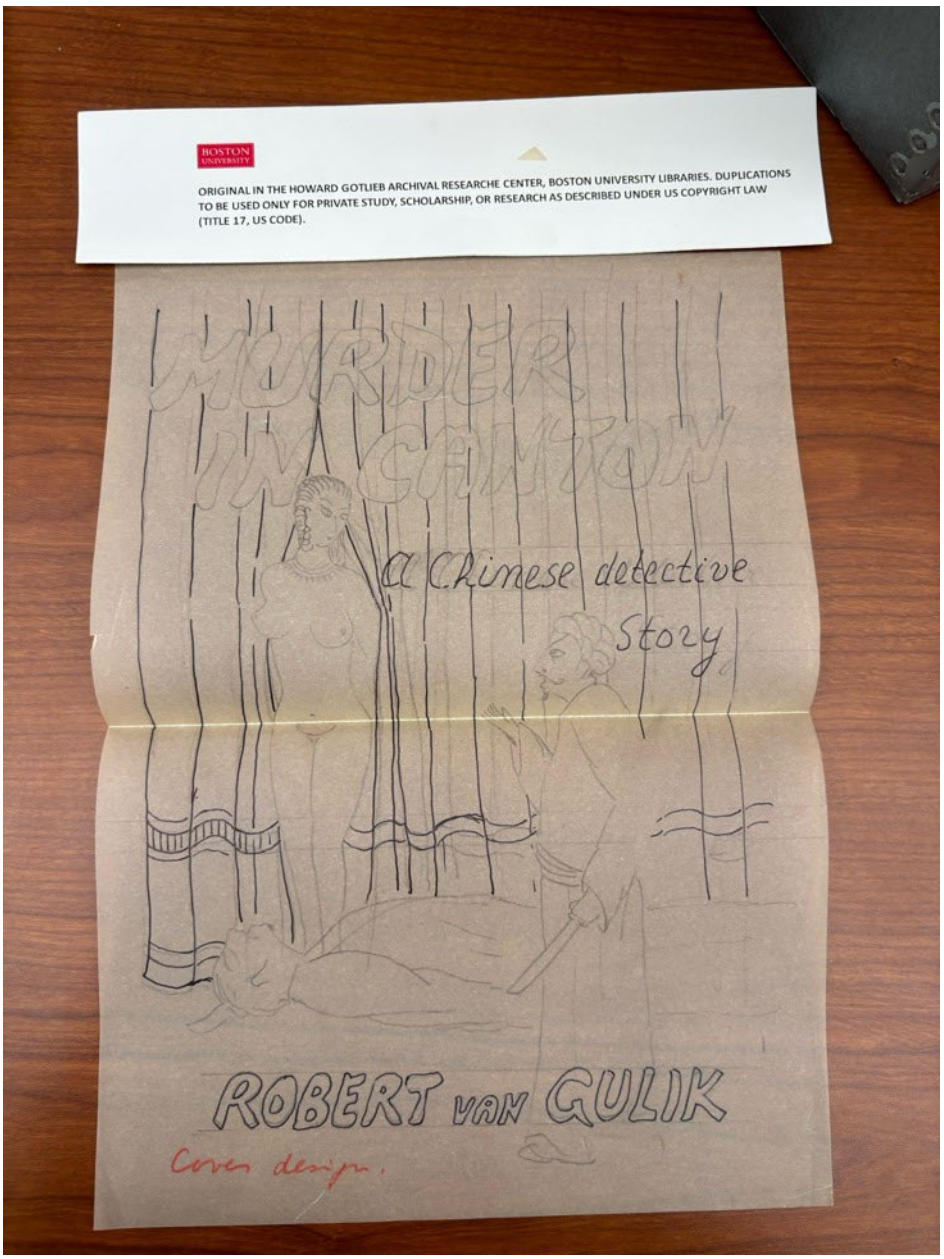

Fig. 35. Robert van Gulik's draft of cover for *Murder in Canton*.
Author's photograph of van Gulik's sketch, Box 2, Robert Hans van Gulik Collection #358, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University.

Fig. 36. “The Consort of A God” in *The Phantom of the Temple*.
Robert Hans van Gulik, *The Phantom of the Temple* (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 65.

Fig. 37. “A Girl Surprised in A Mulberry Bush” in *The Chinese Gold Murders*. Van Gulik, *The Chinese Gold Murders: A Judge Dee Detective Story*, 149.

Fig. 38. An illustration from *Huaying Jinzhen* 花营锦阵. Anonymous.
Robert Hans van Gulik, *Erotic Colour Prints of the Ming Period: With an Essay on Chinese Sex Life from the Han to the Ch'ing Dynasty, B.C. 206-A.D. 1644* (Boston: Brill, 2003), vol. 2, 269.

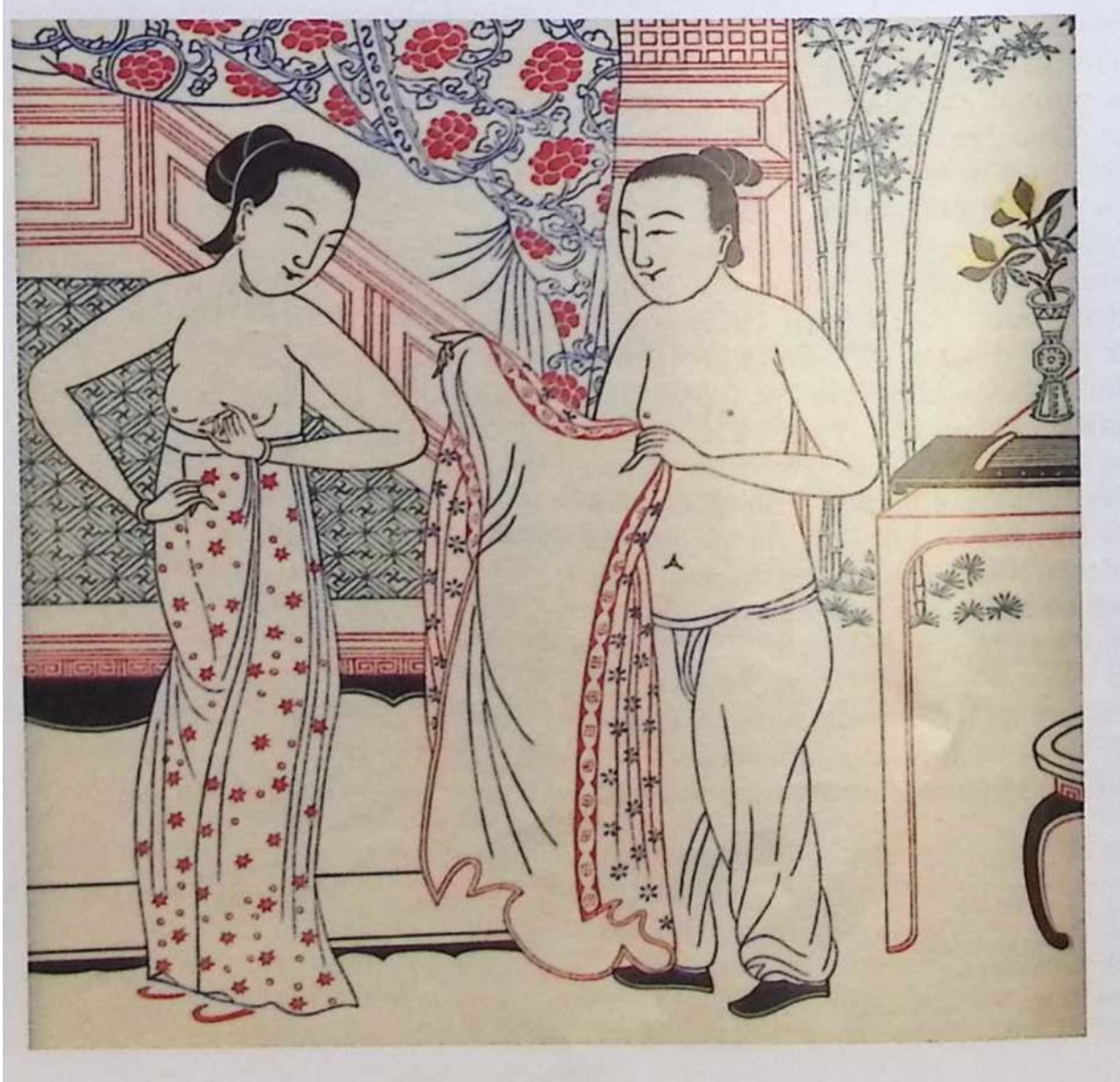

Fig. 39. An illustration from *Fengliu Juechang Tu* 风流绝唱图. Anonymous.
Van Gulik, *Erotic Colour Prints of the Ming Period,* vol. 1, plate XI.

Fig. 40. An illustration in *Fūryū zetchō zu* (Japanese edition of *Fengliu Juechang Tu*). Collection of Muban Foundation, London.
Image from James Sören Edgren, "Late-Ming erotic book illustrations and the origins of ukiyo-e prints," *Arts Asiatiques* (2011): 132.

Fig. 41. An illustration in *Fūryū zetchō zu* (Japanese edition of *Fengliu Juechang Tu*). Collection of Muban Foundation, London.
Image from Edgren, “Late-Ming erotic book illustrations and the origins of ukiyo-e prints,” 133.

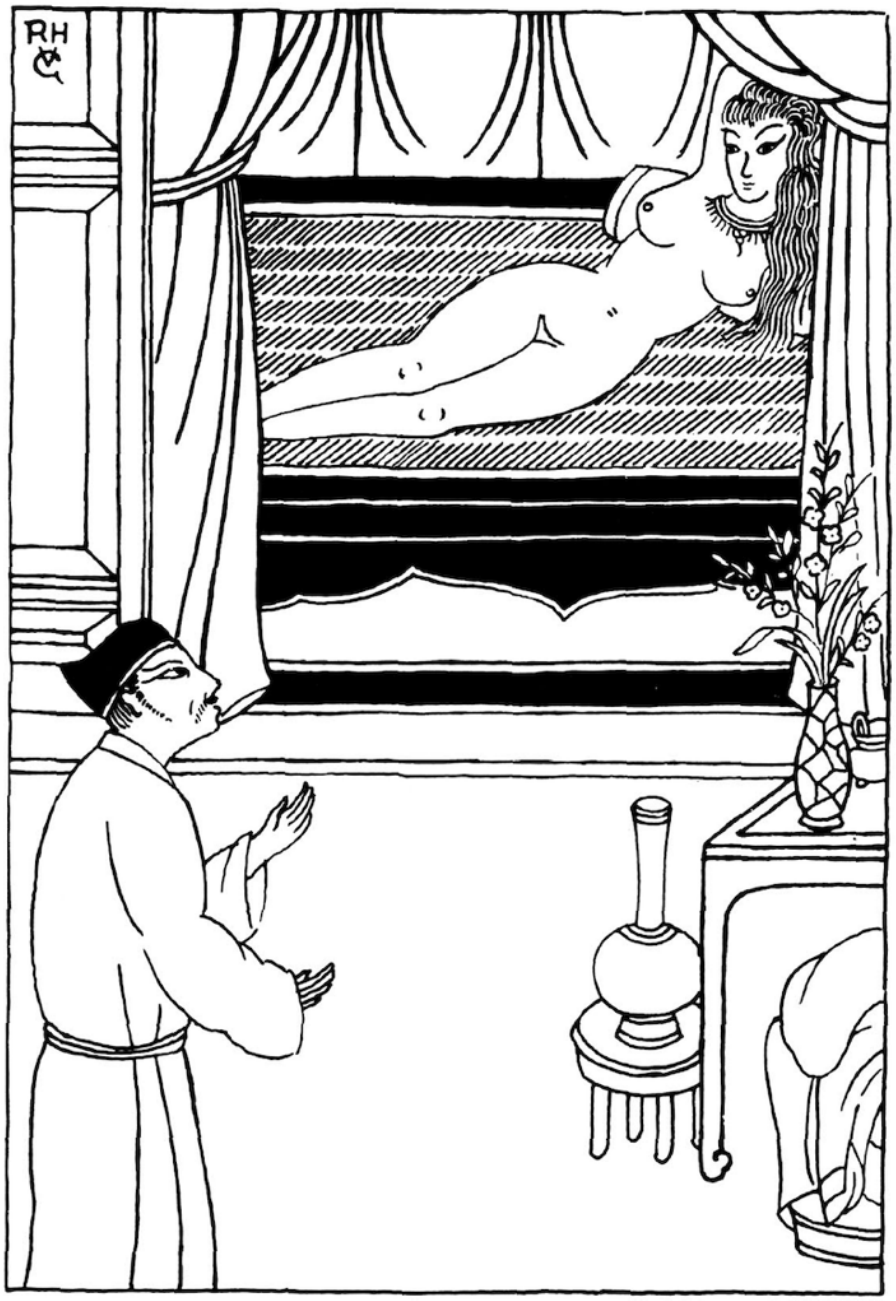

Fig. 42. “Chiao Tai Visits the Smaragdine Dancer” in *Murder in Canton*.
Robert Hans van Gulik, *Murder in Canton* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 79.

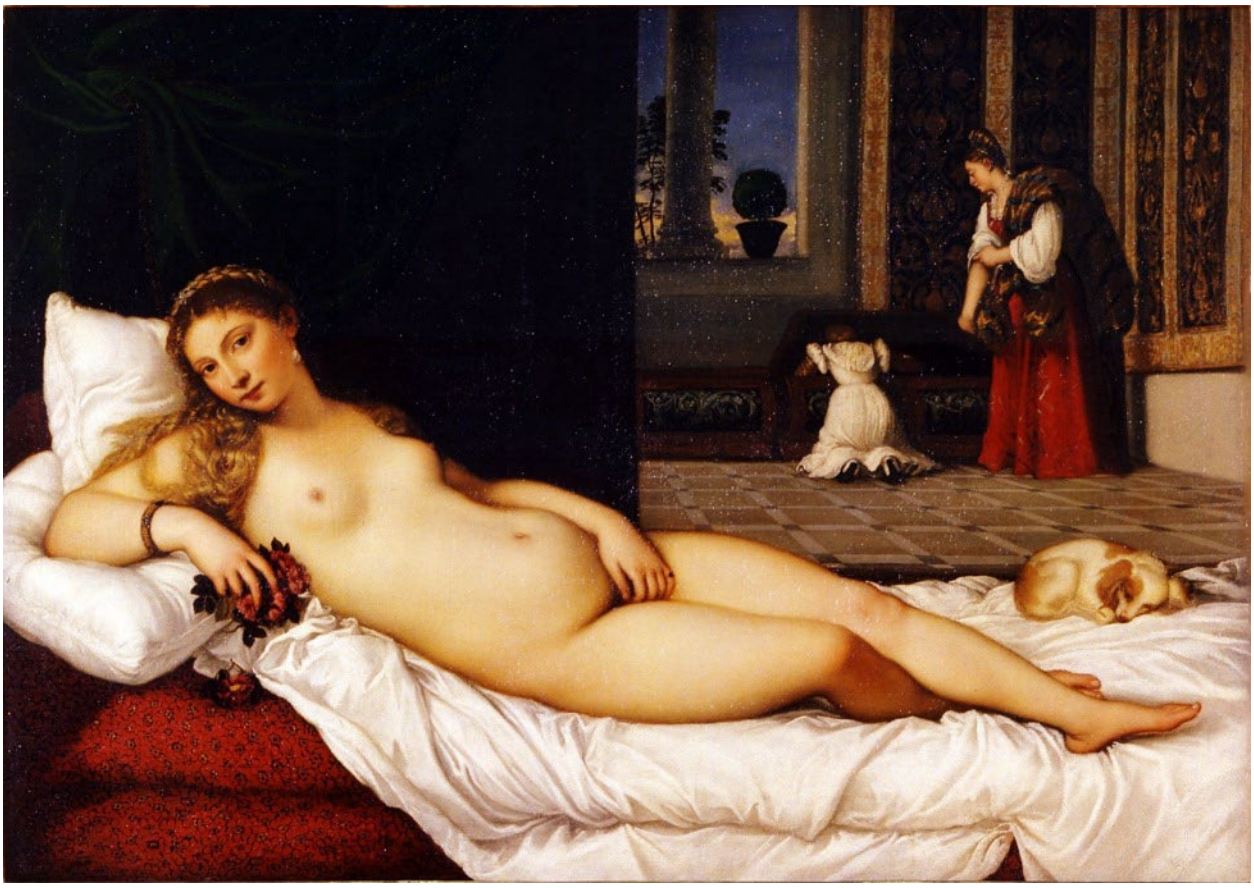

Fig. 43. *Venus of Urbino*. Titian, 1538, Oil on canvas, 119x165cm. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. 1890 no. 1437.
https://www.uffizi.it/en/artworks/venus-urbino-titian.

Fig. 44. An illustration from *Xi Xiang Ji*.
Wang Jide 王骥德 and Shifu Wang 王实甫, *Ying Ming ben hui tu xin jiao zhu gu ben Xi xiang ji* 景明本绘图新校注古本西厢记 [Illustrated Jing Ming Edition of the Romance of the Western Chamber: Newly Collated and Annotated Ancient Edition] (Beiping: Fu jin shu she, 1929), vol. 1, plate 11.

Fig. 45. An illustration from *Jin Ping Mei*.
Jin Ping Mei chatu ji: Mingdai chongzhen keben 金瓶梅插图集: 明代崇祯刻本 [Illustrated Collection of *Jin Ping Mei*: Chongzhen-Era Ming Dynasty Woodblock Edition] (Nanning: Guangxi Meishu Chubanshe, 1993), 19.

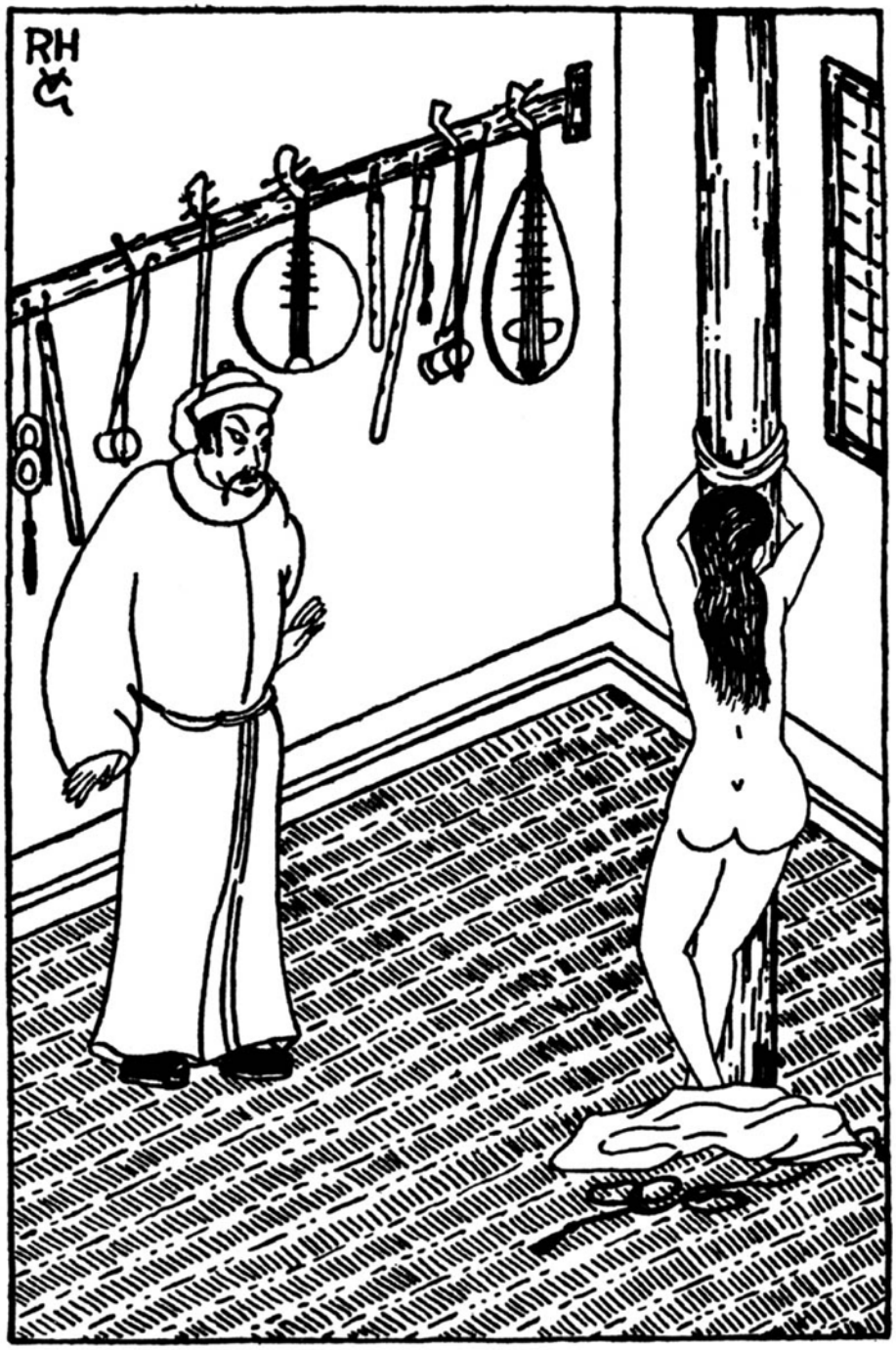

Fig. 46. “Ma Joong Makes a Discovery” in *The Red Pavilion*.
Robert Hans van Gulik, *The Red Pavilion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 55.

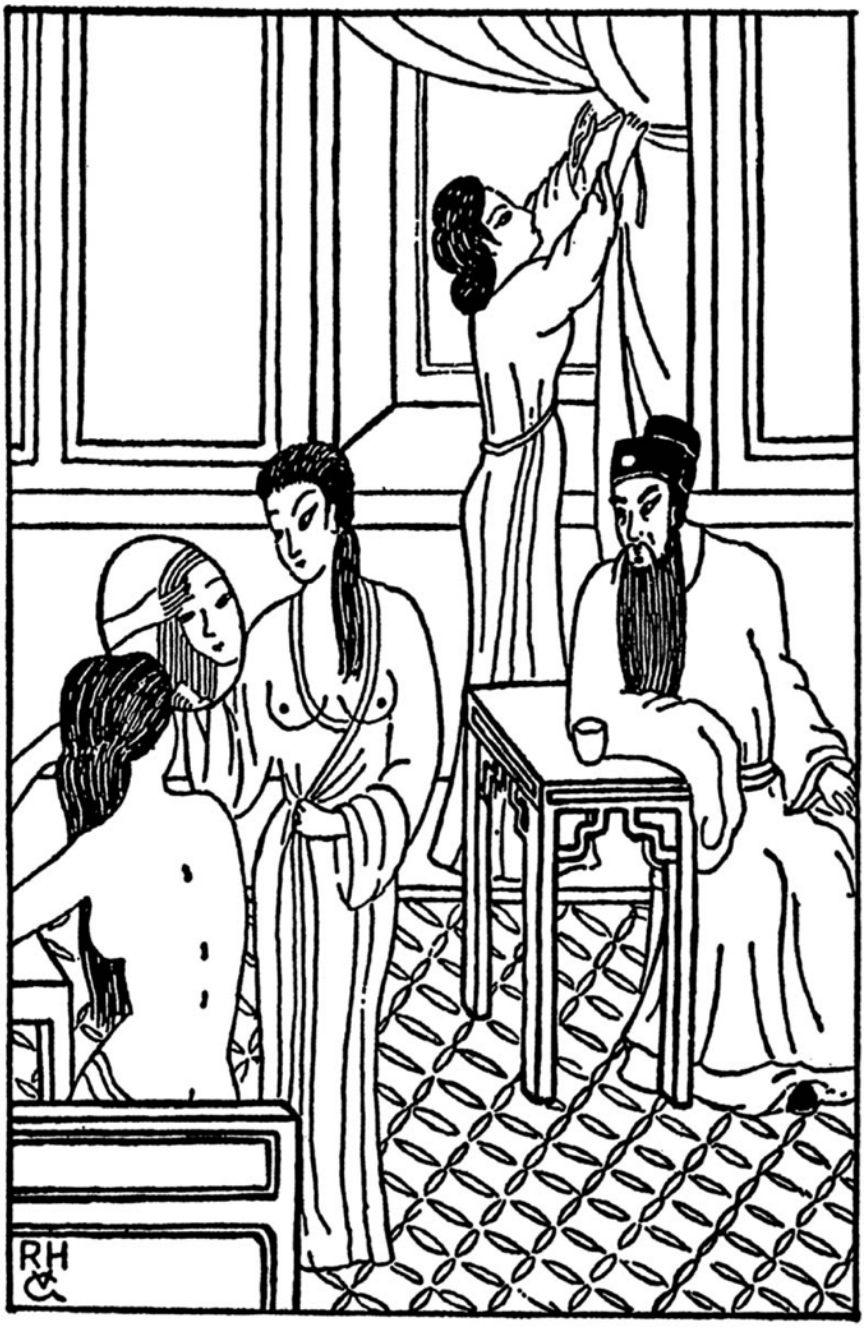

Fig. 47. “Judge Dee and His Three Wifes” in *The Haunted Monastery*.
Robert Hans van Gulik, *The Haunted Monastery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 196.

APPENDIX B

TABLES

Title of Book	Writing Time	Illustrations
Dee Gong An (Celebrated Cases of Judge Dee)	1947	9 illustrations including 3 original Chinese illustrations
The Chinese Bell Murders	1948–1951	15 illustrations+1 map
The Chinese Maze Murders	1950	20 illustrations+1 map
The Chinese Lake Murders	1952–1957	13 illustrations+1 map
The Chinese Gold Murders	1956	10 illustrations+2 maps
The Chinese Nail Murders	1958	8 illustrations+1 map+10 diagrams of tangram
The Lacqure Screen	1958	10 illustrations+4 illustrations depicting the four seasons
Judge Dee at Work	1958	8 illustrations
The Haunted Monastery	1958–1959	8 illustrations+2 maps
The Red Pavilion	1959	6 illustrations+1 map
The Emperor's Pearl	1960	8 illustrations+1 illustration dipicting Dragon Boat Race+1 floor plan
Murder in Canton	1961–1962	12 illustraions+1 map
The Willow Pattern	1963	15 illustrations+ 1illustration of the vase
The Monkey and The Tiger	1963	9 illustrations+1 map
The Phantom of the Temple	1965	9 illustrations+1 map+1 floor plan
Necklace and Calabash	1966	8 illustrations +2 illustrations of a necklace and a calabash
Poets and Murder	1967	8 illustrations +1 bird's-eye view

Table 1. Illustrations of Judge Dee stories.

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