

Friday 9 April • 13.00-17.00 (CET)

# Rethinking Robert van Gulik: New perspectives and approaches

KVVAK YOUNG SCHOLARS' SYMPOSIUM



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9 April 2021

## Rethinking Robert van Gulik: New perspectives and approaches

KVVAK YOUNG SCHOLARS' SYMPOSIUM

We are delighted to welcome you to this one-day symposium, the third in the series of KVVAK Young Scholars' Symposia. We have entitled the symposium 'Rethinking Robert van Gulik', because all of today's presenters bring new perspectives and approaches to a subject that continues to fascinate. Robert van Gulik (1910-1967), or Gāo Luópèi 高羅佩 as he is known in China, appears to us in many guises: some see him mainly as a diplomat or collector of Chinese art; some know him for his scholarly writings on the zither (*qin*) or on sexual life in ancient China; others know him as the author of the famous Judge Dee detective stories.

Today's presenters all shed new light on Van Gulik. Koos Kuiper will show us a pair of scrolls with calligraphy by Van Gulik, and discusses their meaning by looking at their seal imprints. Marc Gilbert opens a box full of lute-related materials for us, revealing a view of Van Gulik's personal friendships. Gung Man seeks to assert new order over the collection of calligraphy and paintings owned by Van Gulik. Karwin Cheung will focus on a private trip Van Gulik made to Korea in 1949, to discuss the blending of private and public that characterised Van Gulik's life. Shi Ye revisits Van Gulik's *Sexual Life in Ancient China* by way of material culture. Paramita Paul will explore the role of Buddhism in the Judge Dee mysteries, while Hu Xuejiao discusses the many genres in which the Judge Dee books have been reimagined. Finally, Meimei Zhang sheds new light on Van Gulik's zither by talking about its musical rival: the *zheng*.

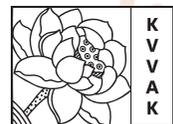
This event would not have been possible without the help of numerous individuals and organizations. They include the Royal Society of Asian Art in the Netherlands (Koninklijke Vereniging van Vrienden der Aziatische Kunst, KVVAK), Ikigai (KVVAK's young professionals network), the Rijksmuseum, and the Hulsewé-Wazniewski Stichting. The event is also supported by the Chair of Asian Art, in turn sponsored by the KVVAK, the HWS, the Isaac Ailion Foundation, the Stichting tot Bevordering van de Studie van China aan de Universiteit Leiden and the Jan Menze van Diepenstichting. We are especially grateful for the generous support of the late Jan Maarten Boll, Pauline Kruseman, and the Van Gulik Estate.

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KVVAK Young Scholars' Symposium, April 9, 13.00 hrs CET or 1 PM  
Time: April 9, 2021 01:00 PM Amsterdam, Berlin, Rome, Stockholm,  
Vienna

[universiteitleiden.zoom.us/j/62334561881?pwd=cWRzZmdXSmdVqcnJZNmtrK09aVWFGdz09](https://universiteitleiden.zoom.us/j/62334561881?pwd=cWRzZmdXSmdVqcnJZNmtrK09aVWFGdz09)

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## PROGRAM

- 12.45 Online walk in
- 13.00 Welcome by Anne Gerritsen (Professor Chair of Asian Art Leiden University, KVVAK), Eline van den Berg (Ikigai, Prinsessehof National Museum of Ceramics) and Thomas van Gulik (Van Gulik Estate)
- 13.15 **PANEL 1**  
*Chair Menno Fitski (Rijksmuseum Amsterdam)*
1. Robert van Gulik's Chinese seals and his hand scroll with seal imprints: recent gifts from the Van Gulik Family to the Rijksmuseum  
*Koos Kuiper (Leiden University Library)*
  2. Opening Van Gulik's music box: scores, friendship and other goodies  
*Marc Gilbert (Leiden University Library)*
  3. Robert van Gulik's Collection of Chinese Calligraphy and Painting  
*Kung Man (Christie's, Hong Kong)*
  4. The art of diplomacy: Robert van Gulik's art collection in the context of his diplomatic career  
*Karwin Cheung (National Museums Scotland)*
- 14.25 Q&A moderated by Menno Fitski
- 14.40 Tea break

15.15

**PANEL 2**

*Chair Willemijn van Noord (National Museum of World Cultures/Museum Volkenkunde)*

5. The Significance of Robert van Gulik's Works on Ancient Chinese Sexual Life: A Material Culture Perspective

*Shi Ye (Shanghai Normal University)*

6. Of Temple Phantoms and Bell Murders: Images of Buddhism in the Judge Dee Mysteries and the 'Oriental Idol' in the 20th century

*Paramita Paul (Amsterdam University College)*

7. Judge Dee's transgeneric journey: Chinese translation and adaptation of Robert van Gulik's Judge Dee Novels

*Hu Xuejiao (Shanghai International Studies University)*

8. Classicizing the Qin 琴 by Debasing its Rival: The Literary Construction of the Zheng 箏 from the Wei-Jin through the Song Periods

*Meimei Zhang (Occidental College, Los Angeles)*

16.35

Q&A moderated by Willemijn van Noord

16.50

Wrap-up by Anne Gerritsen

17.00

Closing

## ABSTRACTS AND BIOS

### 1. ROBERT VAN GULIK'S CHINESE SEALS AND HIS HAND SCROLL WITH SEAL IMPRINTS: RECENT GIFTS FROM THE VAN GULIK FAMILY TO THE RIJKSMUSEUM



In December 2020 the Van Gulik family donated 50 Chinese seals carved or collected by Robert van Gulik to the Rijksmuseum, and also a 13 m long hand scroll (horizontal scroll) with imprints of 75 seals carved or collected by him, and a pair of scrolls with calligraphy by Van Gulik and imprints of five seals. Koos Kuiper will introduce the hand scroll of imprints, show and explain some

seal imprints, and present a new interpretation of the meaning of the pair of calligraphy scrolls.

*Seal of Robert van Gulik, carved by Ma Heng.  
Photograph by Koos Kuiper.*

**KOOS KUIPER** was curator of the old Chinese and Japanese books and manuscripts in Leiden University Library; he retired in 2016. In 2010, he created an exhibition about Robert van Gulik (and his seals) in the Leiden University Library. He is still working as an interpreter and translator of Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese). In the past, he translated several works of modern Chinese literature into Dutch, and taught evening

courses of Chinese for almost 40 years. He published several articles about Dutch-Chinese contacts, and his doctoral thesis was published as *The Early Dutch Sinologists (1854-1900)*. Leiden: Brill, 2017.



## 2. OPENING VAN GULIK'S MUSIC BOX: SCORES, FRIENDSHIP AND OTHER GOODIES



*Photograph by Marc Gilbert*

In 2020, the Van Gulik family donated to Leiden University Libraries two batches of documents: manuscript and printed music scores, and a carton box labeled 琴譜. A dozen of booklets, concertina books and off-prints, full of tablatures for the Chinese lute, have already found a place on the shelves and are currently being digitized. As we open the box, we get a glimpse of the world built by Van Gulik around the

Chinese lute: more scores, letters, a funeral notice, ephemera, zither strings, etc. This presentation shares some preliminary observations on the corpus of scores, and on the friendship that shows through the pages of these documents.

**MARC GILBERT** graduated from Peking University and INALCO. He was in charge of the Chinese collections at the Lyon Public Library, before becoming curator of the Chinese special collections at Leiden University Libraries.



### 3. ROBERT VAN GULIK'S COLLECTION OF CHINESE CALLIGRAPHY AND PAINTING



In 1935 Robert van Gulik was appointed as diplomat for the Dutch embassy in Tokyo, where he studied the Eastern cultures, conducted academic research and started to collect ancient Chinese calligraphies and paintings. His collection of Chinese painting and calligraphy can be divided in two major groups: his own study collection and works he received as gifts from teachers and friends. After he passed away, his collection of calligraphies and paintings was auctioned off and disappeared into various public and private collections around the world. This presentation tries to sort out an inventory and reconstruct the scope of his collection.

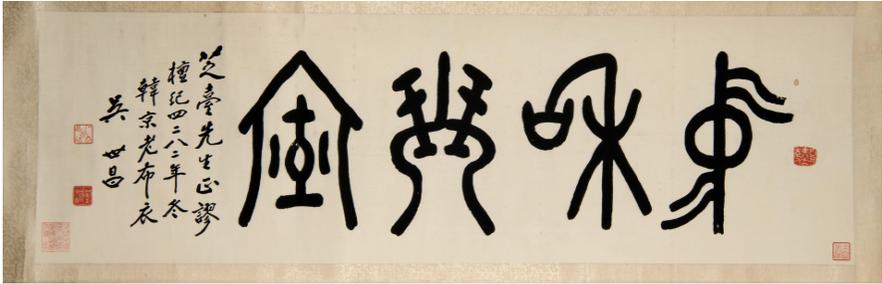
*Fu Xinyu (1896-1963), Willow Pond in Spring. Scroll, mounted and framed, ink and colour on silk. 18.2 x 44 cm. 1954. Christie's.*

**KUNG MAN** received his Ph.D in Chinese literature, Nankai University in China. Currently he works as expert of Chinese calligraphy and painting for Christie's Hong Kong (2013-). He holds a professorship at Yunnan University (2009-), and serves as researcher at the Institute of Cultural Heritage at Peking University (2013-) and as consultant for Jao Tsung-I Petite Ecole in Guangzhou (2014-). His published books include *Huang Ren jiqi xiaoshou xiaohua zhi yanjiu* (2005), *Xiaoshou kaosuo yu wenxian guocheng* (2009), and *Pu Xinyu nianpu* (2017) and various essays. Since 2009 he organizes annual international conferences on the *guqin* (Chinese lute) in Taiwan, Hong Kong and mainland China.



#### 4. THE ART OF DIPLOMACY:

##### ROBERT VAN GULIK'S COLLECTION AND HIS DIPLOMATIC CAREER



Having received his doctorate at the young age of 24, Robert van Gulik made the curious decision to pursue a diplomatic career rather than continuing in the academy. This was the start of a long and successful career in the Dutch diplomatic service, culminating in a post as ambassador to Japan. However, the business of diplomacy did not keep Van Gulik away from other interests. He continued to conduct research, wrote novels, practised calligraphy, and collected art; fashioning himself after the ideal of a 'scholar-official'.

Van Gulik's art collection is usually discussed with relation to his work in the facet of a scholar. Instead, this talk will place the spotlight on some of the works in his collection from the latter side of the 'scholar-official' identity. After all, there was a large degree of crossover between his collection and his daily work as a diplomat. For example, several works in his collection were gifted by diplomatic contacts or pertain to diplomatic work. Making use of archival records from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and works from his collection, this talk will consider how Van Gulik's scholarly activities informed his diplomatic work and vice versa. One particular episode I will discuss is a trip that Van Gulik made to

*Calligraphy in seal script by O Se-chang (1864-1953), ink on paper, Korea, 1946, Collection National Museum of World Cultures, RV-5265-10.*

Korea. Van Gulik travelled to Korea in 1949, purportedly for a private holiday with the aim of studying Korean culture and history, but was in fact undertaking a covert diplomatic mission.

**KARWIN CHEUNG** is Assistant Curator for East and Central Asia at National Museums Scotland. Prior to taking up this post in 2019, he was curatorial assistant for East Asia at the National Museum of World Cultures in the Netherlands, where he worked with objects from the former Van Gulik collection. Karwin holds an MA in Asian studies from the University of Leiden.



## 5. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ROBERT VAN GULIK'S WORKS ON ANCIENT CHINESE SEXUAL LIFE: A MATERIAL CULTURE PERSPECTIVE



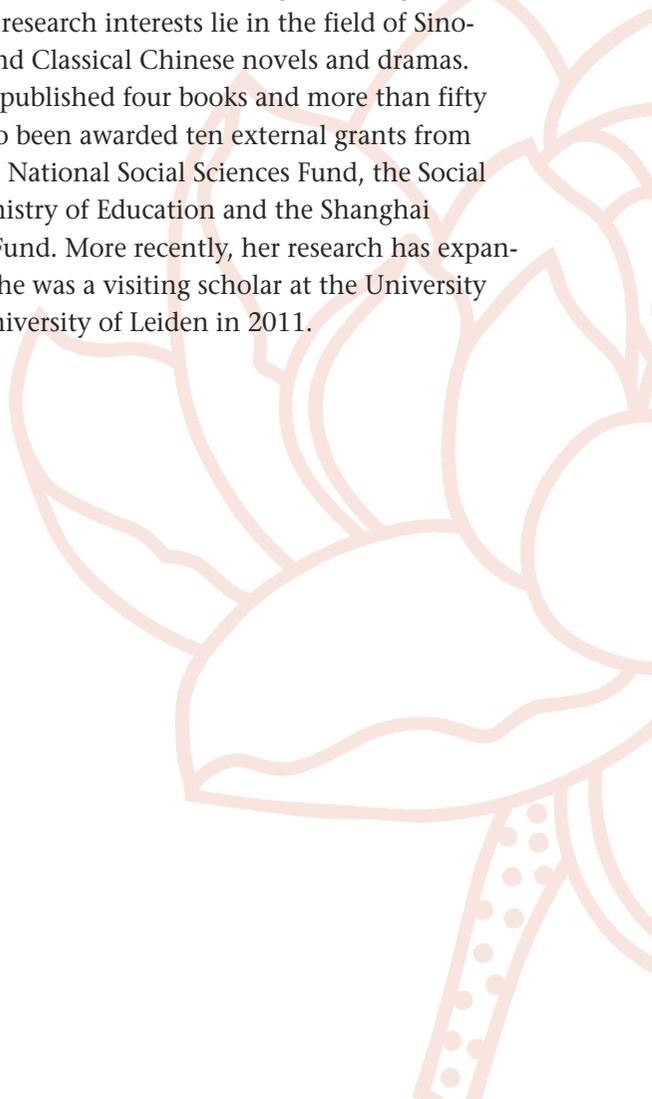
Robert van Gulik dreamed of being a traditional Chinese scholar-official. To achieve his dream, he developed wide-ranging interests and sino-logical knowledge, which included sexual life in traditional China. In the first half of the twentieth century, he published two works: *Erotic Colour Prints of the Ming Dynasty* and *Sexual Life in Ancient China*. Few people have noticed Van Gulik's fetishistic tendencies in this research. By using erotic color prints, Van Gulik offers us a glimpse of pre-modern Chinese sexual culture. Van Gulik pays a great deal of attention

to material objects, such as sex toys, sex medicines, underclothes, bedding and sex aides. He explores the ways in which these objects all serve as metaphors for sexual activities and sexual organs. The significance of Van Gulik's two books, therefore, lies in this placement of material culture within the history of sexuality, creating a perfect example of the new cultural history. He leaves the great questions of history and philosophy to one side, and focuses on the material culture of every-day life. His book provides his Western reader with an insights into Chinese sexual culture, erotic arts and lute culture. This may well explain why he has a higher

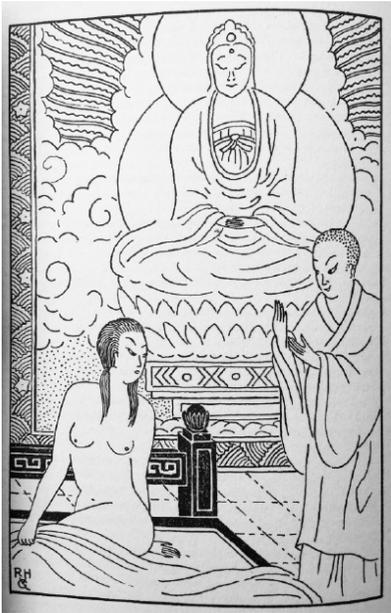
*Robert Van Gulik, Sexual Life in Ancient China: A Preliminary Survey of Chinese Sex and Society from ca. 1500 B.C. till 1644 A.D. (book cover). Leiden: Brill, 1961.*

reputation in China than in his motherland. The Dutch Sinologist Wilt Idema referred to this as the 'Van Gulik phenomenon', which might not have existed without Van Gulik's dream of becoming a Chinese scholar-official.

**SHI YE** is a tenured professor in the Humanities College at Shanghai Normal University. Shi Ye's main research interests lie in the field of Sino-Western cultural exchange, and Classical Chinese novels and dramas. In the past ten years, she has published four books and more than fifty academic articles. She has also been awarded ten external grants from such prestigious bodies as the National Social Sciences Fund, the Social Sciences Fund of Chinese Ministry of Education and the Shanghai Government Social Sciences Fund. More recently, her research has expanded to intercultural studies. She was a visiting scholar at the University of Oxford in 2015 and the University of Leiden in 2011.



**6. OF TEMPLE PHANTOMS AND BELL MURDERS:  
IMAGES OF BUDDHISM IN THE JUDGE DEE MYSTERIES AND  
THE 'ORIENTAL IDOL' IN THE 20TH CENTURY**



Western popular engagement with Buddhism has increased dramatically in the last century. Religious icons for collection and display and representations in literature, art and mass media such as film, television series and comic books have led to wider exposure to this Asian religious tradition. Nonetheless, patterns of representation have often gone unchallenged and unseen (Iwamura), and many modern and contemporary images of Buddhism in the West echo the fear and fascination that have for centuries been associated with the concept of the Buddha as an 'Oriental idol', or an object of both suspicion and romanticization.

In this context, Robert van Gulik's Judge Dee Mysteries occupy a unique position. Composed and illustrated by an outstanding scholar of East Asian culture, these novels complicate ideas of Western understandings of Buddhism in the early 20th century, and are also very different from later Western conceptualizations of the religion.

This paper will focus on three titles from the Judge Dee Mysteries: 'The Chinese Gold Murders', 'The Chinese Bell Murders' and 'The Phantom of

*'Een Boeddhistische abt verrast een gast' ['A Buddhist abbot surprises a guest']*.

Source: Van Gulik, R. 1984: *Klokken van Kao-yang*. Amsterdam: Elsevier: p. 136.

the Temple'. In these three novels, the Buddhist temple is the setting for stories about the smuggling of gold, monks of dubious reputation, and a haunting phantom. The paper will elaborate on the text, as well as on the illustrations: what do the novels, through their protagonists' thoughts and actions, say about Buddhism? And how do Van Gulik's illustrations compare to contemporaneous depictions of Buddhism in Europe and the US? Western captivation with Buddhism includes such varied examples as early European writings in which the Buddha is seen as an immoral figure worshiped by pagans, 'Zen' as a source of inspiration for literature, art, advertising and an 'alternative lifestyle', the phenomenon of 'mindfulness', and martial arts movies and games. This paper will discuss how Van Gulik's stories and visual representations in the Judge Dee Mysteries add to and challenge the larger cultural discourse on Western fascination with Asian religions and 'Asian spirituality'.

**PARAMITA PAUL** is a lecturer at Amsterdam University College, where she teaches the courses 'Introduction to Visual Methodologies', 'Visual Culture', 'Art in China' and 'Global Modern and Contemporary Art'. She was trained in Sinology, has specialized in art history, and received a Ph. D. from Leiden University for her thesis 'Wandering Saints: Chan Eccentrics in the Art and Culture of Song and Yuan China'. Her research interests include premodern and modern Zen and Buddhist art, as well as issues of art, heritage and cultural identity. Recent publications include 'Into the New Wonder House: Visual Images and World-Making in a Buddhist Temple in Chinatown Amsterdam' (Journal of Chinese Overseas, 2018) and 'The Eccentrics of Istanbul: Chan, Art, and Cross-Asian Networks in the Ming' (Ming Studies, 2018).



## 7. PLAYING DOWN THE WHODUNIT: CHINESE ADAPTATION OF JUDGE DEE MYSTERIES



In his translator's preface to *Dee Goong An*, Robert van Gulik claims the element of suspense is missing in most Chinese crime novels, as the guilty person is often revealed in the first few pages. When van Gulik himself experimented with detective stories in traditional Chinese style, he artfully played with suspense to appeal to a modern readership. Judge Dee novels, first translated in 1981,

continue to be popular in China, charming their readers and inspiring numerous adaptations ranging from children's literature and traditional Chinese operas to TV series and films. Yet as the Judge Dee stories travel across media and genre in China, the whodunnit element or the search for the murderer that Van Gulik highlights in his works is sometimes lost. Some adaptations reveal the criminal's identity or drop crucial clues at the very beginning; others delete suspenseful plots. The weakening of the detective story element in these Chinese adaptations can hardly be explained by Chinese preferences alone; rather, it indicates the limitations and conventions of particular media and genres as well as the heterogeneous story world of Judge Dee mysteries that allow for a wide range of possibilities of adaptation. This paper examines the theme of

*left: Robert van Gulik, The Chinese Nail Murders (book cover). Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1977; upper right: Judge Dee Cases (Chinese TV series, 1986); lower right: Xue Hu Pa (Huangmei Opera, 1987), screenshot.*

suspense in three adaptations based on *The Chinese Nail Murders*: a picture-story book for children, an opera with a 'Crime and Punishment' theme and a TV series.

**HU XUEJIAO** is a PhD candidate in translation studies and comparative literature at Shanghai International Studies University and was a CSC visiting researcher at the Leiden Institute for Area Studies at Leiden University (2019-2020). She obtained her Master's degree in Translation Literature at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Her research interests mainly lie in the Chinese reception and reconstruction of foreign discourse, translation studies and adaptation studies. She also engages herself in literary translation practice and published three translations.



**8. CLASSICIZING THE QIN BY DEBASING ITS RIVAL:  
THE LITERARY CONSTRUCTION OF THE ZHENG  
FROM THE WEI-JIN THROUGH THE SONG PERIODS**



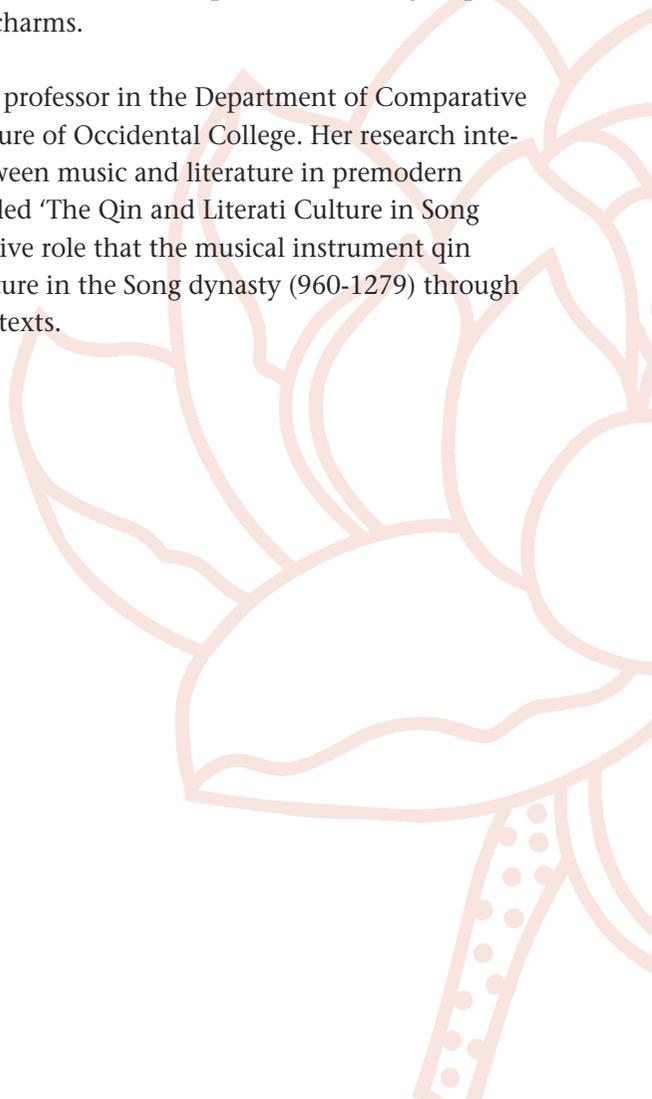
From the Northern Song dynasty and on, the qin (seven-string Chinese zither) had been established as a musical instrument that represented the ideal music of China's high antiquity. Literati figures such as Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072) initiated a trend that constructed the qin as a musical instrument that connected people with ancient sages in the Confucian tradition and

represented Zhou Dynasty musical ideals. This trend helped the qin gain meanings, aesthetic values, and poetic sensibilities beyond the musical sphere. Nevertheless, classicizing the qin was not an isolated phenomenon, but was accompanied by relegating other musical instruments to a relatively lesser position. Like the qin, the zheng is also a plucked string instrument with a more than two-thousand-year history. The modern zheng commonly has twenty-one strings, while in the Tang and Song periods, the prevalent form had thirteen. An examination of the zheng's historical evolution from the Wei-Jin period to the Song dynasty in literati culture unveils the social context and uses of the zheng as well as the gender sensitivities and cultural significances that it had been associated with. In literary works composed during the Song, especially in the popular genre of ci lyrics, the zheng was used particularly frequently as a

*'Listening to the Qin' by Southern Song painter Liu Songnian. The Cleveland Museum of Art. Leonard C. Hanna, Jr. Fund 1983.85*

prop when the theme was about the life of courtesan girls. I argue that Song writers constructed the zheng as a rival to the qin, delimiting its sphere to the women's quarters or even demimonde, and adding erotic and exotic touches in a way that framed the instrument as inferior and its sounds as resembling the corrupted music of 'Zheng and Wei' in the ancient past. This contrast drawn between the qin and the zheng helped to build on the qin's unique charms.

**MEIMEI ZHANG** is an assistant professor in the Department of Comparative Studies in Language and Culture of Occidental College. Her research interest is in the intersection between music and literature in premodern China. Her dissertation, entitled 'The Qin and Literati Culture in Song China', examines the distinctive role that the musical instrument qin played in Chinese literati culture in the Song dynasty (960-1279) through its representations in literary texts.



## THE ROYAL ASIAN ART SOCIETY IN THE NETHERLANDS

The Royal Asian Art Society in the Netherlands (KVVAK) was founded in 1918. The Society's main goal is to disclose high-quality Asian art to a wider audience, to create interest in it and to stimulate academic research in this field.

The KVVAK collection (about 2000 objects) is internationally regarded as a world-class collection and is exhibited in the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.

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