

# A Ming Dynasty Imperial Edict: a Royal Way to Chinese Studies

Marc Gilbert 馬日新 | Leiden University Libraries 萊頓大學圖書館



Taiwan Studies and Sinology Studies in the World  
National Central Library, Taipei November 1-2, 2022



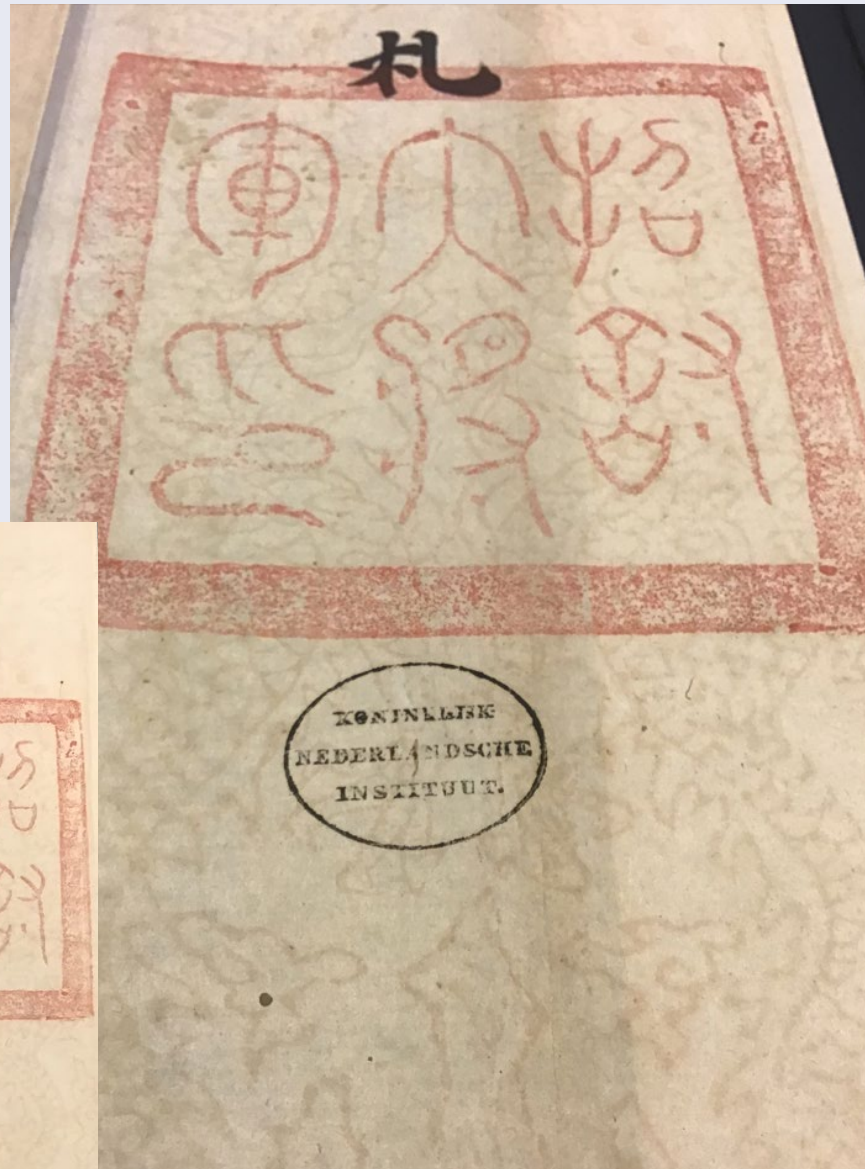
## Leiden University Libraries acquires 16th-century Chinese imperial edict from Robert van Gulik's collection

Published on 18 February 2021

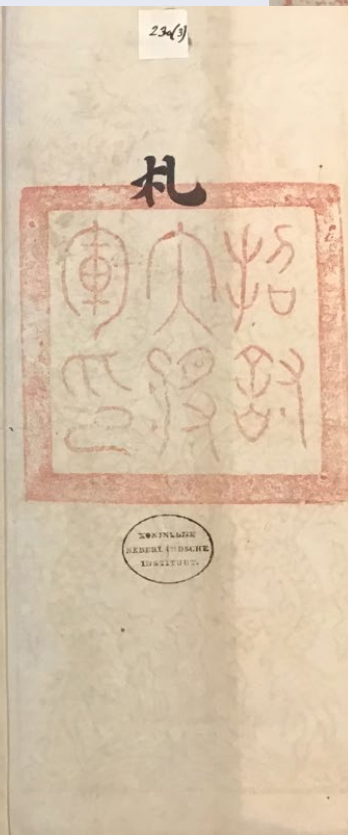
Leiden University Libraries (UBL) has been able to acquire an extraordinary Chinese manuscript at auction in Hong Kong. It concerns an Imperial Edict (dated 1582) from the Ming dynasty period, at one time part of the former collection of well-known sinologist and author of detective-novels Robert van Gulik. Thanks to a large private donation and support by our Friends Foundation, the UBL was able to purchase the piece with mediation from Jan Six.

# 軍大招 印將討

Field Marshal of the Punitive Expedition



先王德意比及諭至彭湖而  
 轉達通商永為和好無失我  
 不敢自裁即馳啟來聞不佞隨諭地方官  
 王舟到彭湖時有書與彭湖地方官  
 去歲  
 王及巴禮與荷蘭人書備見誠實心甚嘉之  
 荷蘭出海王蕭元回具述  
 王雅意通好又覽  
 嗣封世子札致



Acad. 228 (3), dated 1664



Robert van Gulik 高羅佩 (1910-1967) in his study, Tokyo, 1941  
courtesy of the Van Gulik family

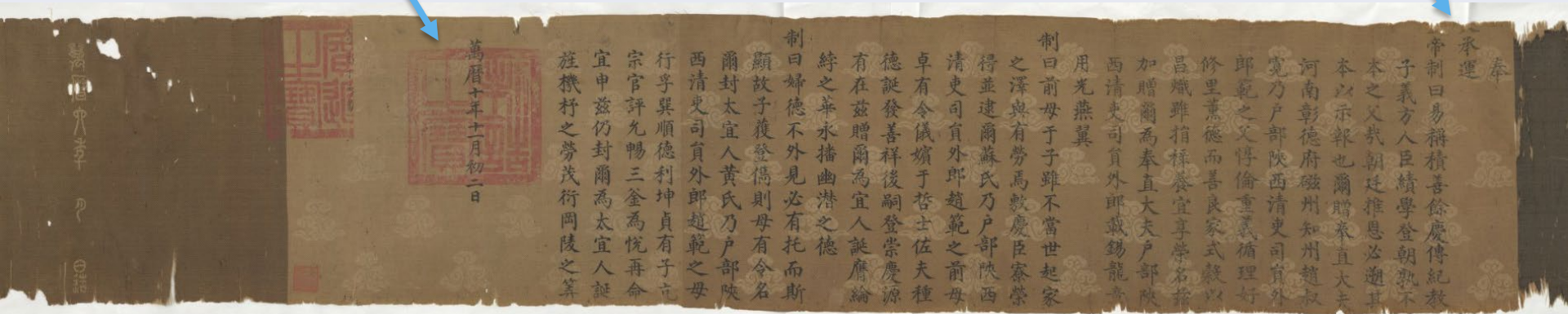
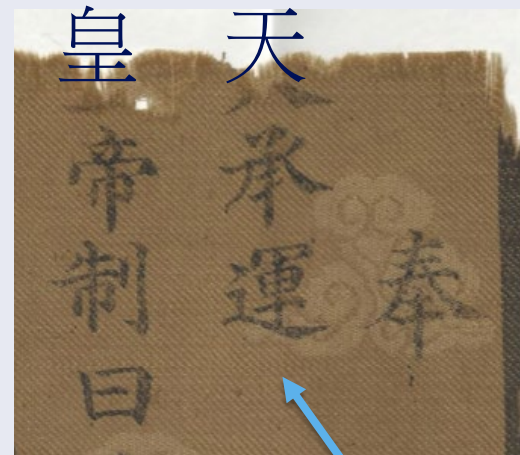
萬曆十年十一月初二日

### The Edict

Friday, November 26,  
1582

missing characters

august heaven

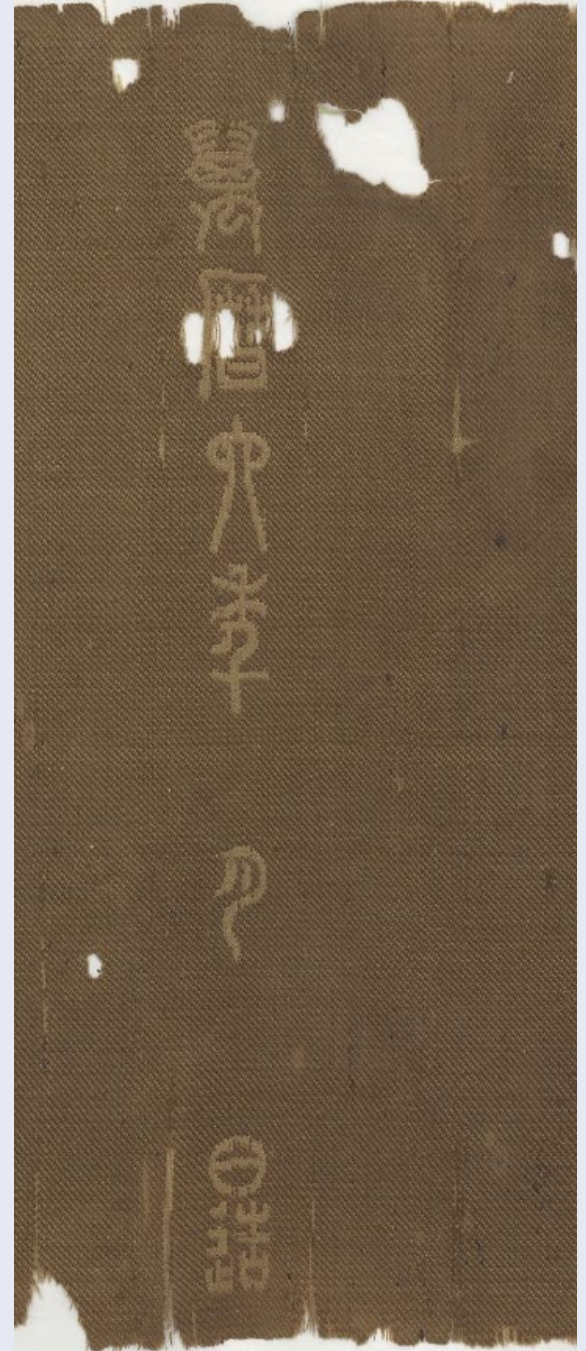


SINOL. Gulik 4661.1

Digital collections: <http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:3188585>

Manufactured  
on the sixth  
year of the  
Wanli reign  
(1578).

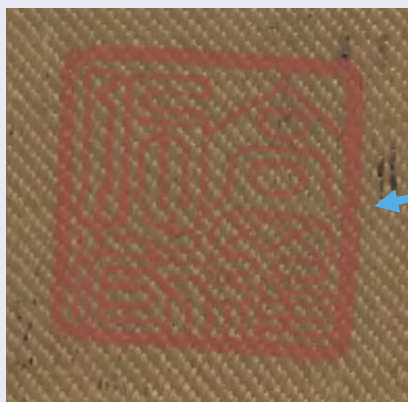
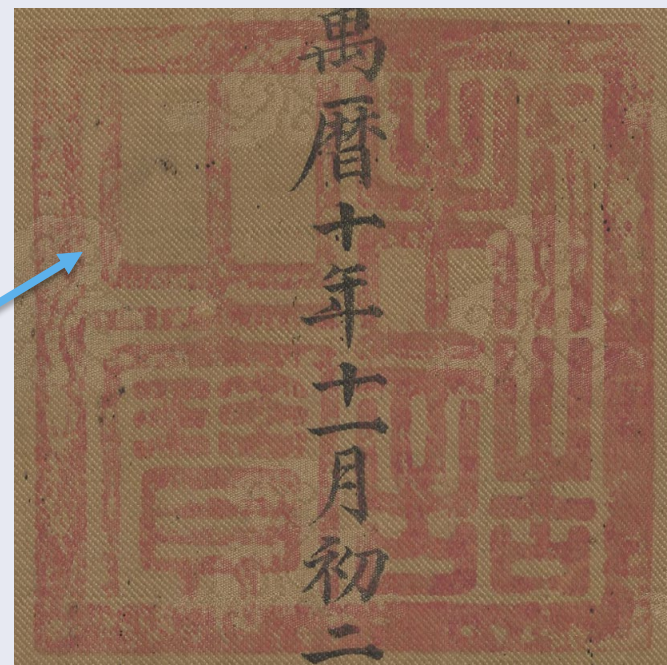
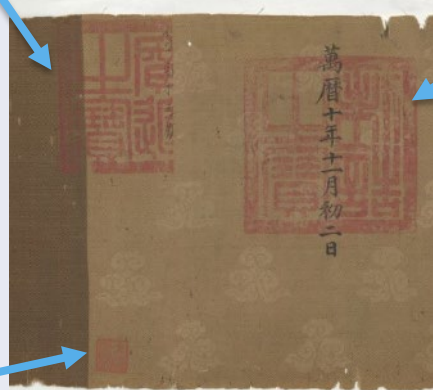
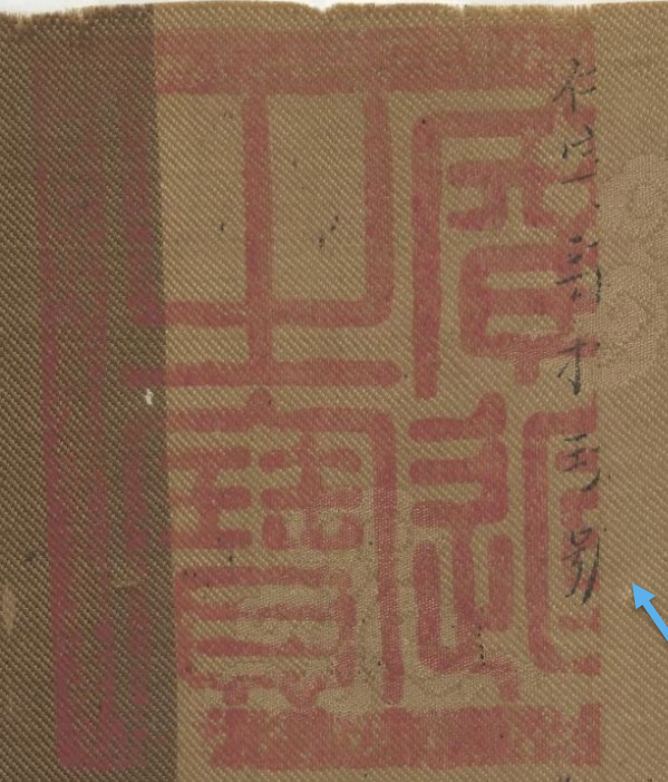
萬曆六年  
月  
日  
造



Seal of Far-Reaching Influence 廣運之寶

仁字柒拾玖號

The Treasure Seal of the Imperial Decree 制誥之寶



Robert van Gulik's seal 高羅佩藏

## Students at Work – Conservation and Provenance

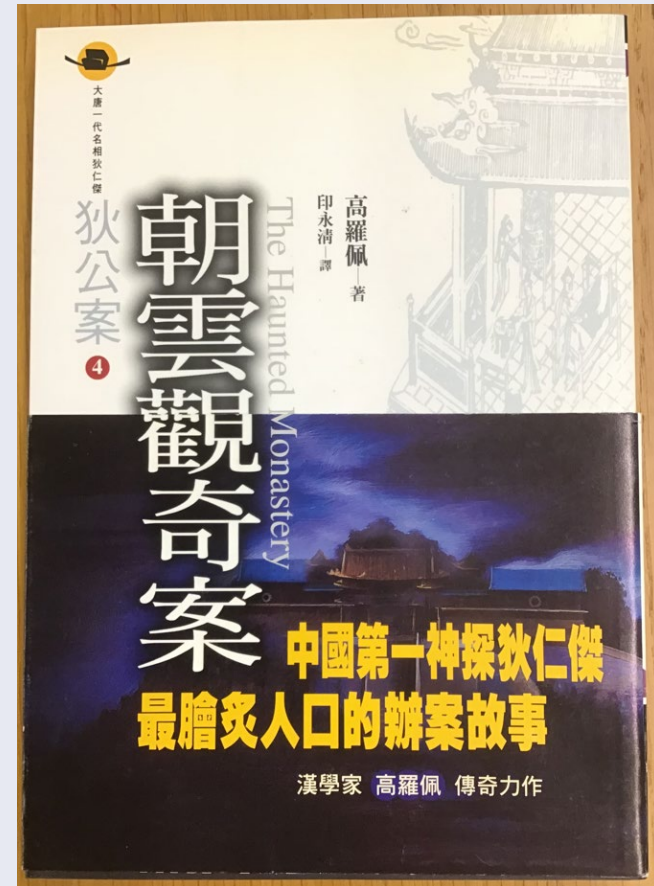
*Four Great and Strange Cases from the Era of Empress Wu Zetian*



Di Renjie, from the Tang dynasty

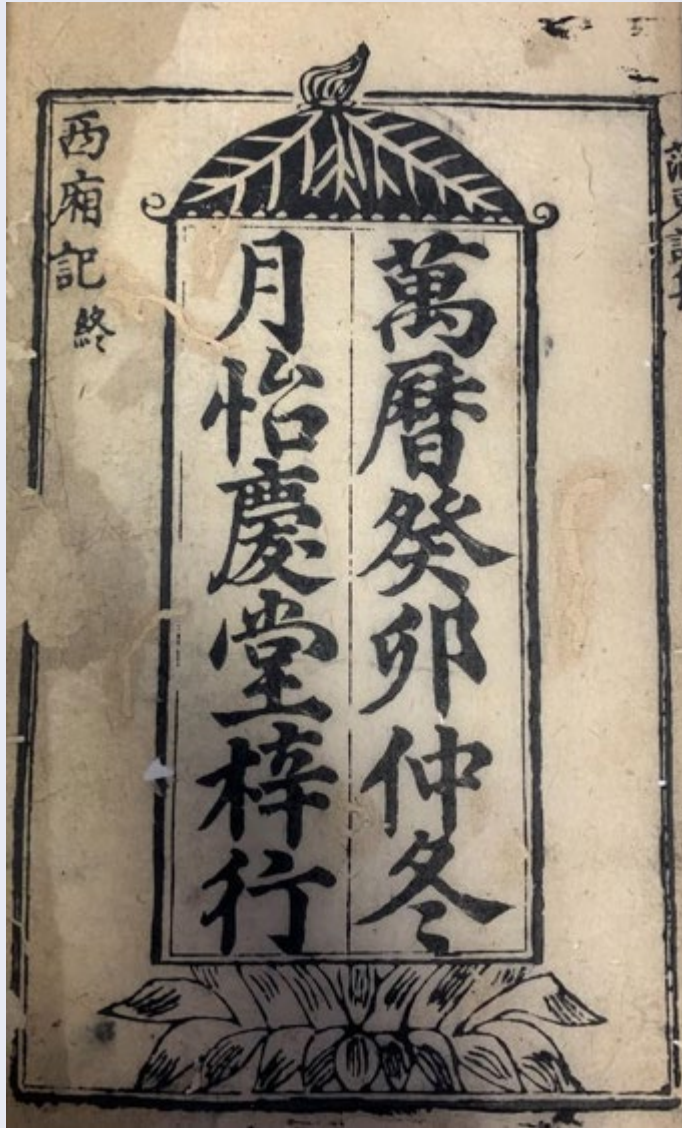


SINOL. Gulik C Wu TTS



Translation of *The Haunted Monastery*, a Judge Dee mystery





SINOL. Gulik C Hsi HCW

Van Gulik's seal  
高羅佩藏

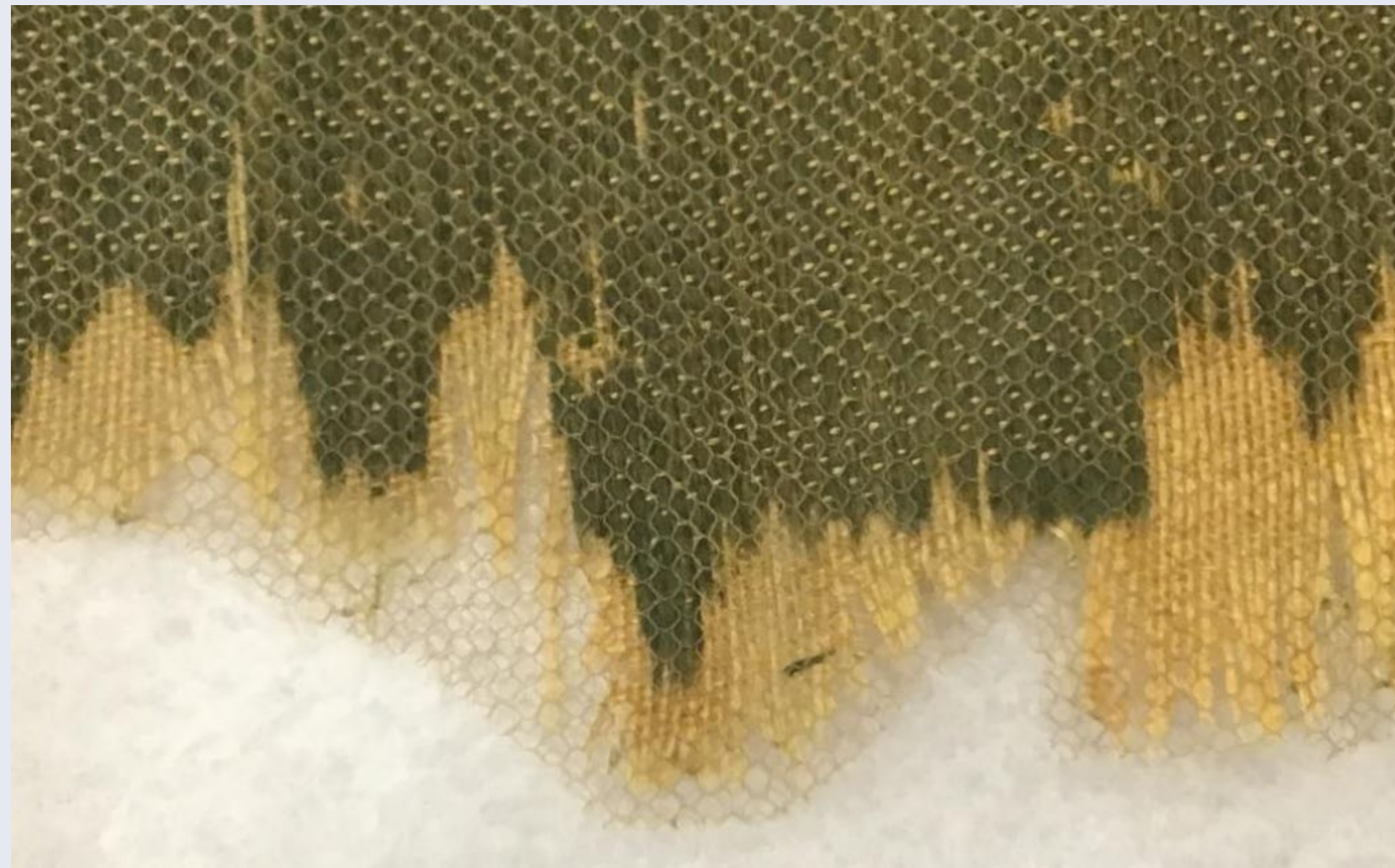


SINOL. Gulik E Shen ST

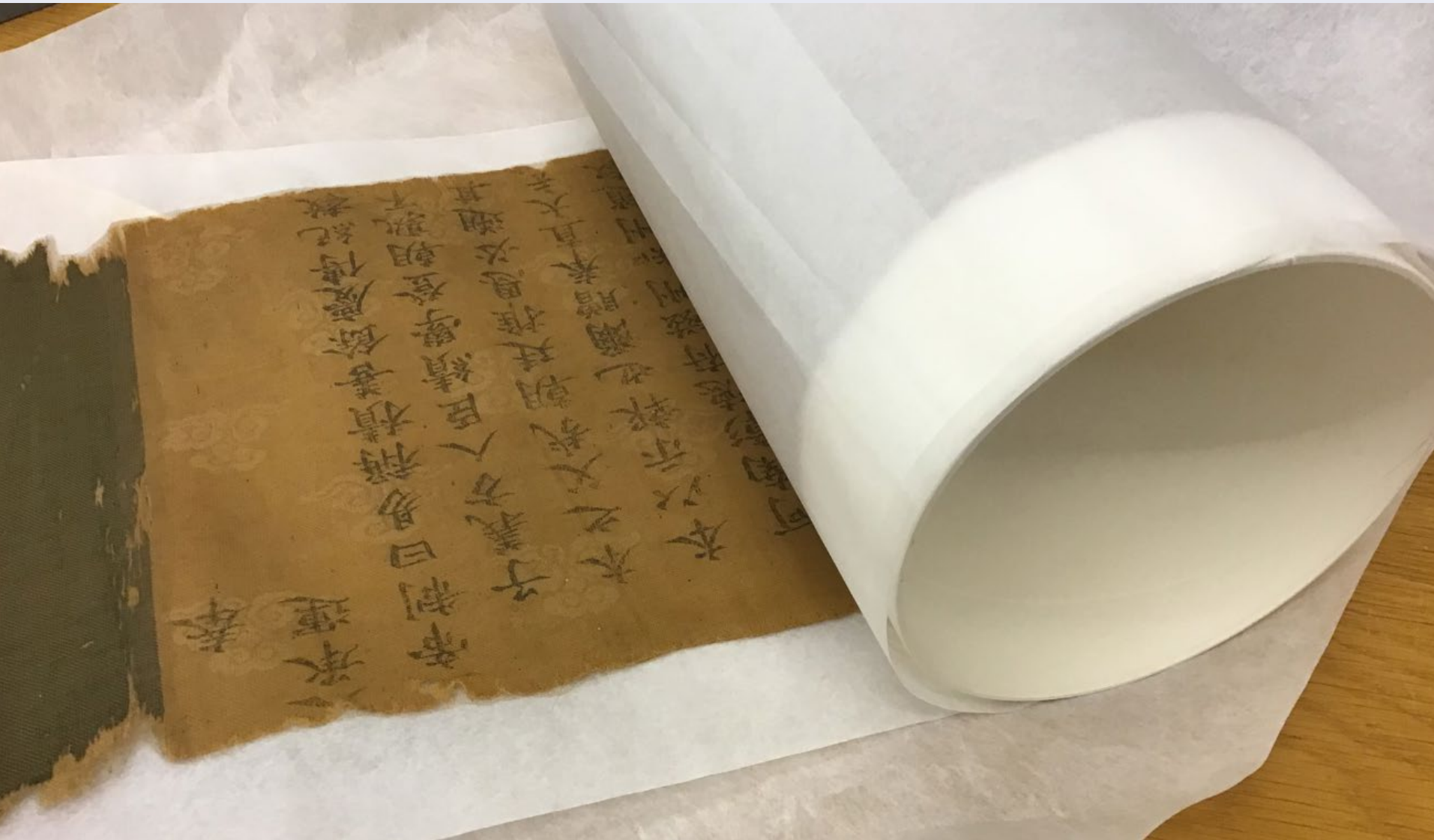




Photos by Karin Scheper  
and Sjoukje Telleman



Supporting the edict with tulle.

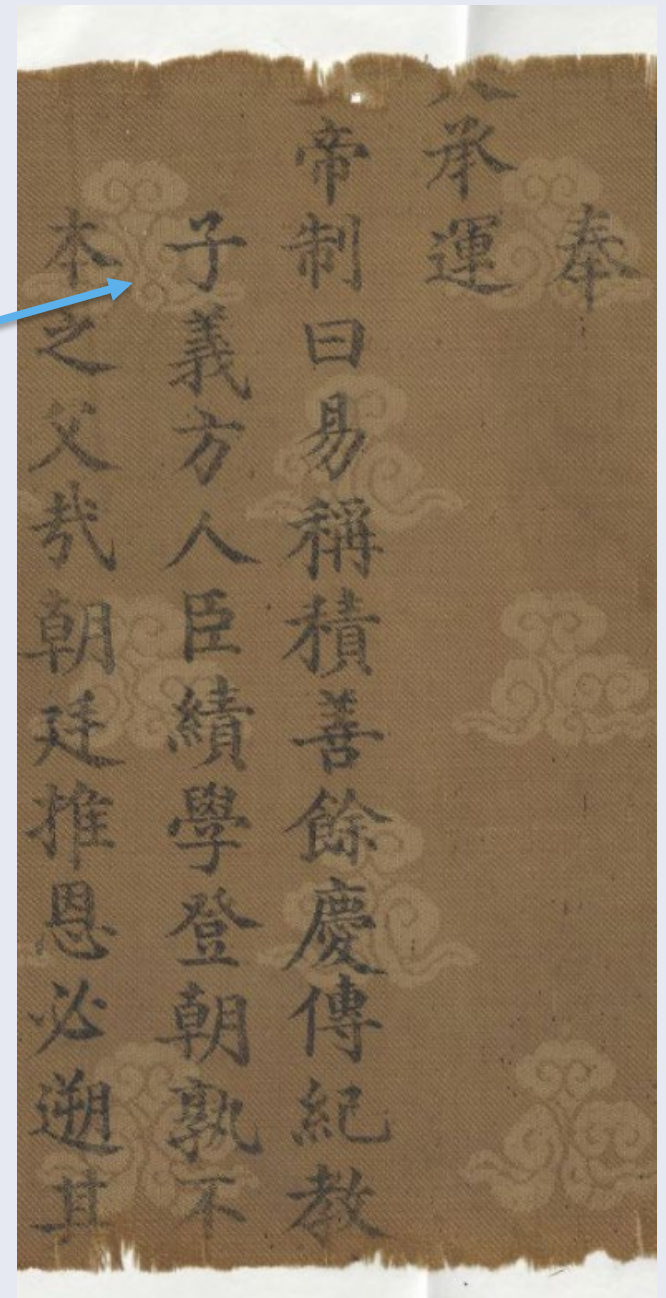


Edict rolled-up after restoration

## Students at Work – Translating the edict

奉天承運，皇帝制曰：  
《易》稱積善餘慶，《傳》  
紀教子義方，人臣績學登  
朝，孰不本之父哉！

The Emperor obeys heaven's will and receives its mandate, He decrees: "The *Book of Changes* says that accumulating merit will lead to an excess of blessings. The *Zuo Commentary* records teaching the son the ways of duty. Whenever an official ascends to court by accumulating knowledge, his achievement always originates from his father!





Beijing (北京): the capital of the Ming empire and the place where the edict was made and issued.

Zhangpu (漳浦), Fujian Province (福建省):  
Hometown of Zhao Fan's family



Illustration by Jelle Kuiper

Students at Work – Historical and Social Backgrounds



Xu Xianqing (徐顯卿, 1537–1602) receiving an edict at age 51.  
(Palace Museum, Beijing)



《易》稱積善餘慶，《傳》紀教子義方，人臣績學登朝，孰不本之父哉！

前母于子，雖不當世，起家之澤，與有勞焉。敷慶臣寮，榮得並逮。  
[...]卓有令儀，嬪于哲士，佐夫種德，誕發善祥，後嗣登崇，慶源有在。

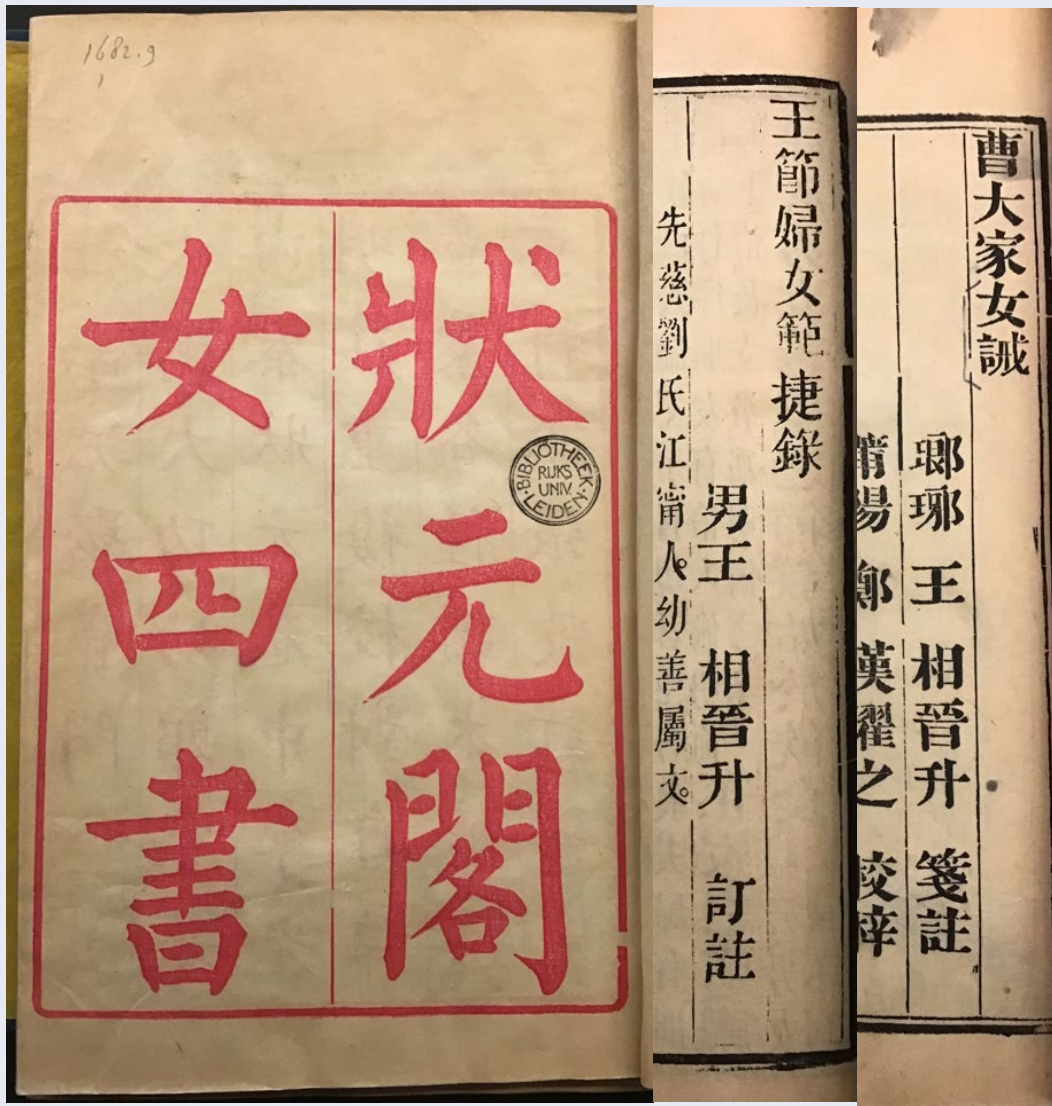
婦德不外見，必有托而斯顯。故子獲登儁則，母有令名。[...]行孚巽順，德利坤貞[...]。

Translation by Jelle Kuiper

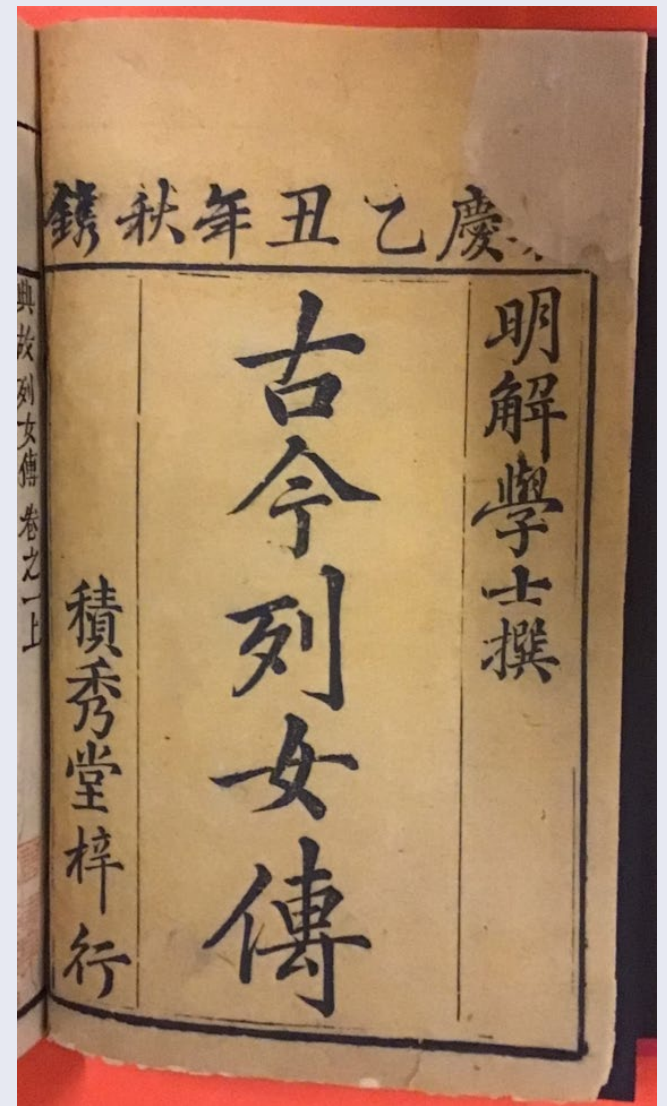
“The *Book of Changes* says that accumulating merit will lead to an excess of blessings. The *Zuo Commentary* records teaching the son the ways of duty. Whenever an official ascends to court by accumulating knowledge, his achievement always originates from his father!

As for the late mother’s relationship to her son, even though she is no longer alive, she participated in and contributed to the beneficial influences causing the family’s rise. When granting blessings to officials, honors should also reach her. [...] You were distinguished by an elegant appearance and were married to a wise gentleman. You assisted your husband to plant the seeds of virtue and gave birth to good fortune. As for your descendant’s promotion, here lies the origin of this glory.

The virtue of a woman does not appear on the outside. It must rest on something [else] to become manifest. Therefore, when a son is able to rise to an outstanding standard, his mother will have an excellent reputation. [...] Your behaviour is truly humble and submissive, and your virtue contributes to the chastity of womanhood [...].



*Zhuangyuan edition of the Four Books for Women*  
SINOL. 1682.9 1



*Biographies of Women Ancient and Modern*  
SINOL. 2261.8

## Outreach



Unboxing the Edict: [edu.nl/rnw9a](https://edu.nl/rnw9a)

Asian Library's  
Facebook page:  
[edu.nl/hmgbn](https://edu.nl/hmgbn)



Asian Library

Publié par Gilbert Marc · 30 avril 2021 ·

Have you ever wondered what it is like to restore a 500-year-old post I hope to give insight into the process of the conservation of the most recent acquisition for the Chinese special collections: The Edict. When the edict arrived it was in a fragile condition. The edges were torn on the top and bottom, and from the top of the scroll.



Asian Library

Publié par Gilbert Marc · 30 mars 2021 ·

Issuing edicts is a political practice with a long tradition in imperial China. While the umbrella-term 'edict', one study identifies 175 unique historical Chinese terms for pronouncements of the emperor.

One specific category of edict, the 誥命, was aimed at rewarding or punishing officials. Through these edicts, officials were bestowed (or stripped from) titles and honours. The edicts would subsequently be held by the receiving family for generations.

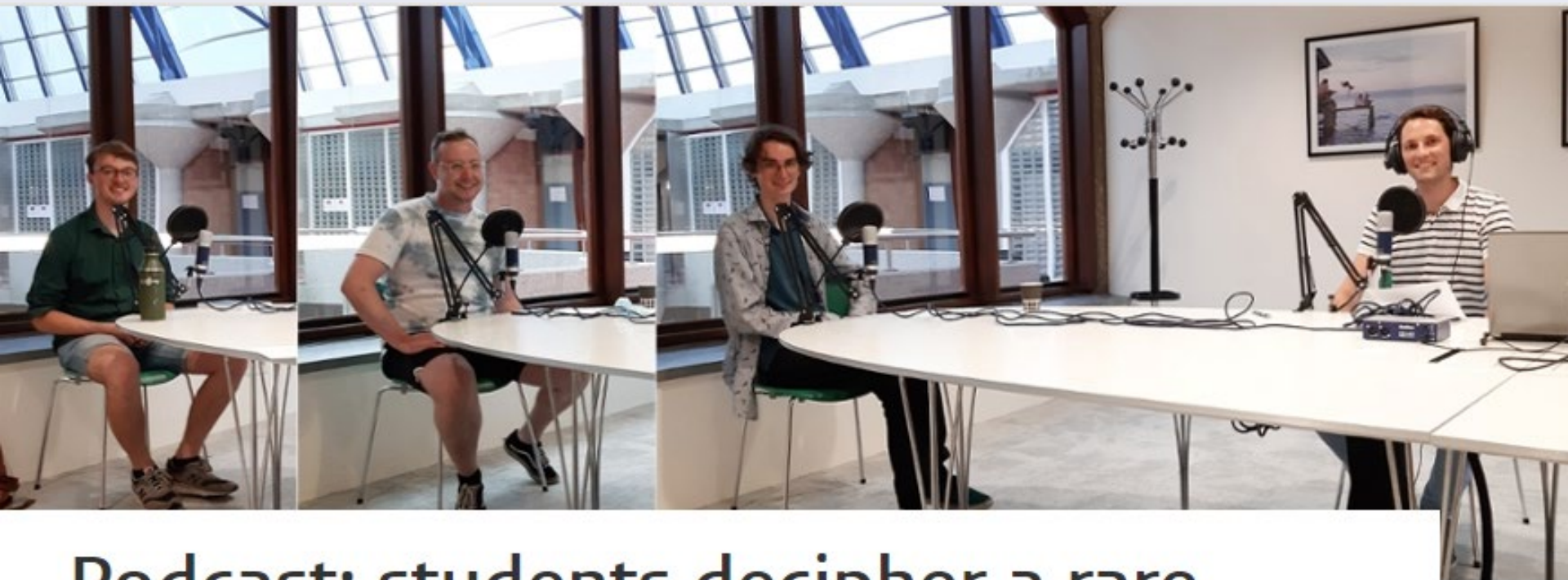


Asian Library

Publié par Gilbert Marc · 23 février 2021 ·

Would you like your parents to be honored for your success, as Zhao Fan did in 16th century China?

Mentioned in the edict recently acquired by Leiden University libraries, Zhao Fan was an official, born in Zhangpu, Fujian Province (blue circle on the map). In 1571 he received the jinshi degree, the highest degree in the imperial examination system. In 1582, the year when the edict was issued, Zhao Fan served as Vice Director of the Shaanxi Bureau in the Ministry of Revenue (the



# Podcast: students decipher a rare Chinese document

Podcast:  
[edu.nl/vbprg](https://www.edu.nl/vbprg)

**Lesson Learnt**





## UBL acquires rare Chinese Miao album

28 March 2022

Leiden University Libraries (UBL) has been able to acquire an exceptional two-volume Miao album. The acquisition was made possible by the Rombouts Fund for Chinese collections. The extraordinarily well-preserved work contains 70 full-page paintings on silk, depicting non-Chinese peoples in the area of China now known as Yunnan province, and 10 full-page painted maps of the region, which was then at the margins of the Qing empire. Miao albums depicting Yunnan province are relatively rare. Most known surviving Miao albums depict peoples from Guizhou province.

Piet Rombouts,  
volunteer at Leiden  
University Libraries,  
working at the Robert  
van Gulik archives



# Thank you

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