



# One of the First to Emerge from the Library Cave: The Seattle Art Museum Sutra Fragment

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RESEARCH

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## ABSTRACT

The biography of a Tang-dynasty Buddhist sutra manuscript fragment in the Seattle Art Museum collection is unique because its provenance can be reliably traced from the discovery of the Library Cave at Mogao in June 1900 to the fragment's arrival in Hawaii around 1938. For decades, the fragment was mounted together with an English-language gift letter dated 1932. The fortuitous retrieval of the author's identity—a twenty-year old student at Tsinghua University—leads us to their grandfather, provincial governor of Xinjiang and Gansu province, Rao Yingqi 饒應祺, who owned the scroll until his death in January 1903. The fragment's ownership history is thus conclusively established between 1900 and 1903, before the arrival of Marc Aurel Stein at Mogao in 1907.

Governor Rao Yingqi probably obtained his scroll from one of three people who gained early access to the Library Cave's contents: Governor-General Wei Guangdao 魏光燾; the Manchu prince Aisin Gioro Zailan 愛新覺羅·載瀾; and Belgian tax collector Paul Splingaerd 林輔臣, a long-term Gansu resident who appears the most likely source. This foreigner is known from Dunhuang oral history recorded by artist Xie Zhiliu 謝稚柳 in the 1940s, where Splingaerd was rumored to have received Library Cave scrolls from Manchu circuit intendant Yan Dong 延棟, which he then regifted to officials in Xinjiang. Xie Zhiliu's description is substantiated by Splingaerd's letters and that of Scheut missionaries in Gansu and Mongolia kept in the CICM archives. The European correspondence indeed places Splingaerd guiding an expedition in Northern Gansu in June 1900, coinciding with the Library Cave's discovery, before reaching Xinjiang in July on the eve of the Boxer Uprising. This study of the SAM sutra fragment illuminates the Library Cave's early dispersal period by recovering the heretofore unknown connection between Splingaerd and Governor Rao Yingqi.

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After a thousand years of efflorescence, the cave temples of Mogao near Dunhuang waned along with the Silk Roads trade and were forgotten over the centuries until the so-called Library Cave was accidentally found in 1900 (Figure 1). Monk Wang Yuanlu 王圓籙 (c. 1849–1931) was the unofficial guardian of the Mogao caves who solicited donations to maintain the temples and restore their statues (Figure 2). According to later accounts, Wang made the momentous discovery on the evening of June 22, 1900 (Guangxu era 26, Gengzi fifth month,



**Figure 1** Door to the Library Cave (Cave 17) once hidden behind a hollow wall in Mogao Cave 16, Dunhuang. Photographed by Marc Aurel Stein, 1907, combining a negative of empty Cave 16 with an image of manuscripts. © British Library, Photo 392/59(1) & Photo 392/59(2).



**Figure 2** Wang Yuanlu in front of the main hall of the Lower Temples, Mogao, Dunhuang. Photographed by Marc Aurel Stein, June 11, 1907. © British Library, Photo 392/26(327).

26th day 光緒二十六年庚子五月二十六日). While clearing sand from Cave 16 together with a workman surnamed Yang 楊, he noticed a hollow wall along the corridor (Xie 1949: 3). Removing the wall, they found a door leading into a small cave filled in an orderly manner with stacks and bundles of scrolls (Figure 3). There were tens of thousands of ancient manuscripts in Chinese, Tibetan, Sanskrit, Uyghur, Sogdian, and Khotanese, as well as textiles and paintings on silk, hemp, and paper.<sup>1</sup> Now numbered Cave 17, the Library Cave was sealed in the eleventh century for reasons unclear and still vigorously debated by scholars.<sup>2</sup> Once opened, the contents immediately began to disperse to the Dunhuang-area local community, although the details on exactly how continue to elude us.

## THE EARLY PERIOD OF DISPERSAL

In his foundational *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang*, Chinese historian Rong Xinjiang 榮新江 emphasized the importance of researching the earliest removals of paintings and manuscripts from the Library Cave, including investigating the circumstances and individuals involved.<sup>3</sup> Rong defines “early dispersal” as occurring between June 1900 and March 1907—that is, the period beginning with the Library Cave’s discovery and ending with the arrival of British-Hungarian explorer and archaeologist Marc Aurel Stein (1862–1943) at Mogao in 1907, followed by French sinologist Paul Pelliot (1878–1945) eight months later. The works that Stein and Pelliot obtained during their expeditions and other major collections have mostly been published. However, a great deal less is known about Library Cave works that entered private hands prior to 1907.

Rong Xinjiang discussed the implications of studying the period 1900 to 1907. The first concerns Wang Yuanlu and his criteria and motivations for selecting some of the finest pieces from the cache as gifts for others. The second concerns Wang’s impact on the integrity of the stacks and



**Figure 3** A group of what Aurel Stein termed “regular” bundles of manuscripts in the Library Cave. Photographed by Marc Aurel Stein, 1907. © British Library, Photo 392/27(589).

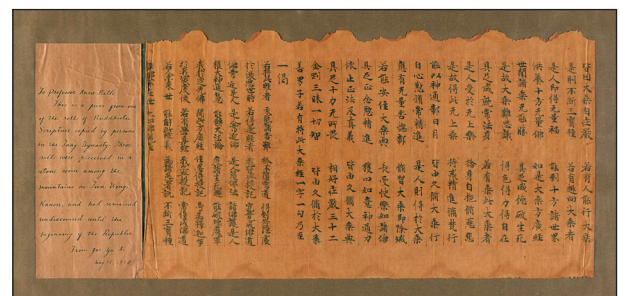


bundles that had been deposited since the original order may lead us to better comprehend why the Library Cave was sealed in the eleventh century. Rong also noted the earliest pieces removed as reliably authentic and therefore informative for evaluating forgeries. Thus, he expressed hope to rediscover materials that first came out of the Library Cave and whose whereabouts remain unknown.<sup>4</sup>

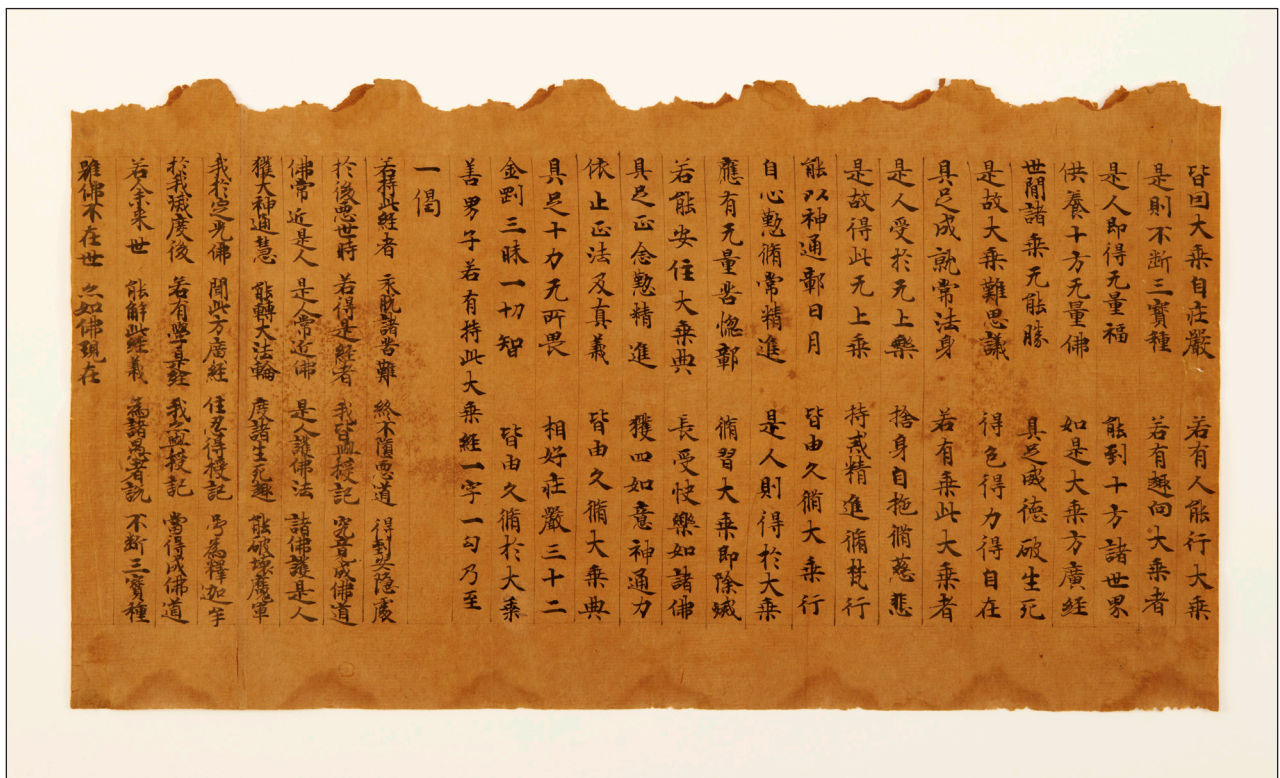
A Tang dynasty (618–907) fragment of a Buddhist sutra manuscript in the collection of the Seattle Art Museum (henceforth SAM) fits Rong Xinjiang's definition precisely (Figure 4).<sup>5</sup> This essay describes the process of recovering the fragment's ownership history, one which conclusively places its origins in the early dispersal period. When it was first brought to SAM by the owner, the fragment came mounted with a letter, in English (Figure 5). The letter was addressed to "Professor Anne Bille," signed by an unidentified person, and dated May 15, 1932 (Figure 6). After determining the identity of the letter-writer, I traced the family line to their grandfather—none other than Rao Yingqi 饒應祺 (1837–1903), provincial governor of Xinjiang and Gansu province. The SAM fragment derived from a scroll owned by Governor Rao from around 1900 to his passing in January 1903 in Xinjiang province; the date and location of death serves as proof that the fragment's provenance predates Aurel Stein's first visit to Mogao.

Governor Rao Yingqi acquired this Library Cave scroll during the early dispersal period, but we do not

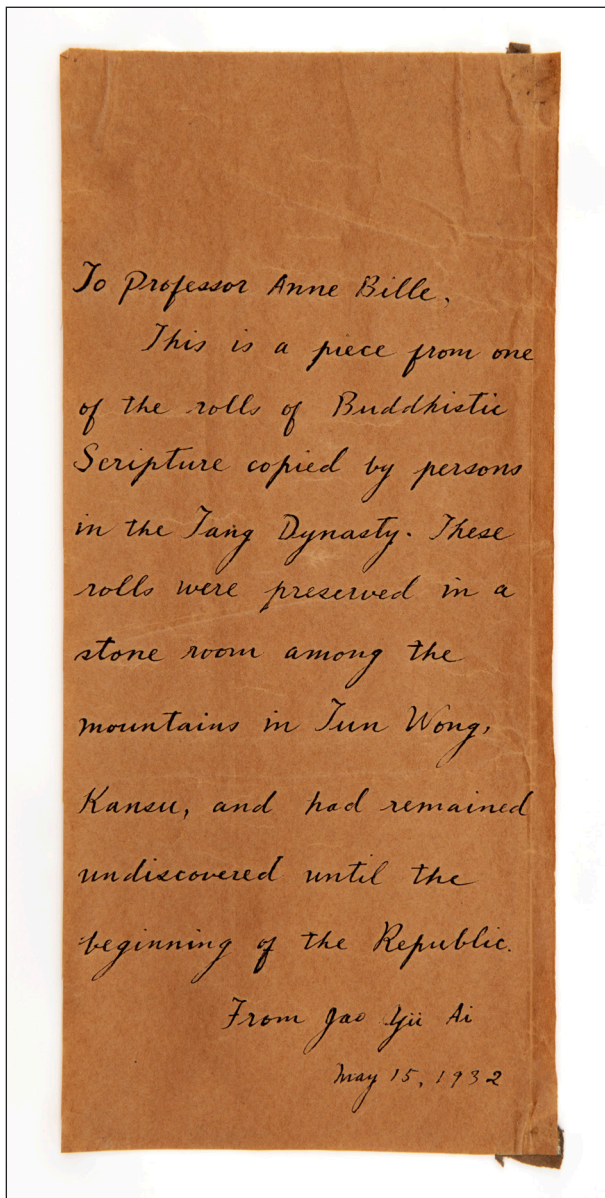
know for sure how he came by it. The below identifies three possible people amongst his acquaintances and colleagues who acquired Library Cave manuscripts and who may have passed along scrolls to him. Already known through the research of Rong Xinjiang and others, the first two are Governor-General Wei Guangdao 魏光燾 (1837–1916) and the Manchu prince Aisin Gioro Zailan 愛新覺羅·載瀾 (1856–1916). The third person is a foreigner whose presence predates Stein, a Belgian man who resided near Dunhuang serving as a Qing dynasty (1644–1912) official and tax collector. He is not always recognized by scholars as having possessed manuscripts from the Library Cave, but missionary letters confirm that he was guiding a group of Belgians prospecting



**Figure 5** Manuscript fragment from Dunhuang mounted with a gift letter while in the collection of Yi-chuan Ching. Photo: Elizabeth Mann.



**Figure 4** Manuscript fragment of *Datong fangguang chanhui miezui zhuangyan chengfo jing* (Sutra on solemn attainment of Buddhahood by means of repentance to extinguish sins in a great, thorough, and broad way), 8th century, Tang dynasty (618–907), Mogao, Dunhuang. Ink on mulberry-fibre paper, 27 × 49 cm (10 5/8 × 19 5/16 in.). Seattle Art Museum, Gift of Anna M. Bille, Fook-Tan, and Clara Ching, 2017.21. Photo: Scott Leen.



**Figure 6** Letter from Jao Yü Ai to Prof. Anna Matilda Bille, 1932, Republic period (1912–49). Ink on paper. Seattle Art Museum, Gift of Anna M. Bille, Fook-Tan, and Clara Ching, accessory of 2017.21. Photo: Scott Leen.

for quartz and gold in northern Gansu when Wang Yuanlu discovered the Library Cave. Given this important coincidence, I will revisit this rather colourful figure as one of the three possible conduits through which some scrolls entered local circulation shortly after the Library Cave's discovery—but appears the most likely source for Governor Rao's scroll that produced the SAM fragment.

## THE EARLY CIRCULATION OF LIBRARY CAVE MANUSCRIPTS

Several local officials and gentry in the Gansu and Xinjiang regions came into possession of Library Cave contents, and it is important to review some of this background prior to discussing SAM's sutra fragment. Rong Xinjiang

discovered the names recorded by Ye Changchi 葉昌熾 (zi Songlu 頌魯, 1849–1917). Appointed Provincial Education Commissioner of Gansu in 1902, Ye arrived in Lanzhou, the provincial capital, in the fifth month of that year. He kept a diary, diligently writing nearly every day: His entry for December 30, 1903 contains the earliest mention of the Library Cave in extant records.<sup>6</sup> In the same entry, he describes his own acquisition of silk paintings and Tang-period sutra manuscripts from the Library Cave. These artefacts were given to him by Wang Zonghan 汪宗翰 (zi Li'an 栗庵, b. 1845), who went to see the Mogao caves in 1902 as the newly appointed Dunhuang County Magistrate (Dunhuang sheng ling 敦煌省令). Ye Changchi noted that monks and laypeople acquired pieces, as did these three officials: Dunhuang County Magistrates Heng Shou 恆壽 (hao Jiemei 介眉, 1853–1903) and Zhang Tingwu 張庭武 (hao Youlü 又履, ?–1917), and an official from Shaanxi named Zhang Yuanchan 張元濤 (zi Xiaoshan 篠珊, dates unknown).<sup>7</sup> In the diary entry for October 13, 1904, Ye describes how Wang Zonghai 王宗海, Assistant Instructor at Dunhuang county's Confucian school, offered him some pieces, which Ye refused, but he accepted two scrolls and one painting from the Mogao caves.<sup>8</sup>

By mid-1902, the Library Cave had clearly garnered lively community interest in Gansu, but we can trace even earlier instances of Library Cave scrolls in the hands of private individuals. One of the first persons monk Wang Yuanlu contacted was a Manchu official named Yan Dong 延棟, Circuit Intendant of Anxi-Suzhou (An-Su *daotai* 安肅道台). Wang traveled 800 *li* (about 400 kilometres) from Mogao to Suzhou 肅州 (today's Jiuquan 酒泉) with a crate full of material from the Library Cave. Yan Dong dismissed the manuscripts, purportedly saying that his own handwriting was better. In any case, scholars agree that Yan Dong likely owned the first and largest private collection of Dunhuang manuscripts numbering many hundreds of scrolls (Rong 2001, trans. 2013: 85–89; Wang 2008/06: 2).

Yan Dong's role in the history of the Library Cave was reported by painter Xie Zhiliu 謝稚柳 (1910–1997), who conveyed the stories he heard while visiting the Mogao caves between autumn 1942 to 1943. The impression of Wang Yuanlu's motives was less than favourable by the 1940s. Xie's account portrayed Wang as someone hoping for financial gain from the Library Cave's contents:

Daoist monk Wang was quite sly and tried to make some money with his discovery. He secretly loaded a case with scrolls and shipped them to Jiuquan, where he presented those to the Manchu Yan Dong, the *Daotai* [circuit intendant] of An-Su circuit. Yan Dong did not realize what these were, he thought that the calligraphy of the scrolls was inferior to his own, thus he did not value them much. Wang felt greatly disheartened by this; he left the manuscripts behind and returned home.



Then a Belgian man from the tax office at Jiayuguan was about to return home to his country and came to visit Yan Dong. When he was about to leave, Yan Dong brought out numerous scrolls and presented them to him. When this Belgian man was passing through Xinjiang, he visited General Changgeng (also a Manchu) and the Daotai by the surname Fan, told them what happened at Dunhuang, then divided the scrolls and gave those to Changgeng and Fan Daotai.<sup>9</sup>

王道士頗機詐，思借之質利，私載經卷一箱至酒泉，獻於安肅道道台滿人廷棟。廷棟不省，以為此經卷其書法乃出己下，無足重。王道士頗喪沮，棄之而去。嘉峪關稅務司比國人某將回國，來謁廷棟。臨行，廷棟出數卷贈之。此比國人行過新疆，復謁長庚將軍（亦滿人）及道台潘某，相與道敦煌事，復以經卷分贈長庚與潘道台。

In these passages, Xie Zhiliu describes how manuscripts passed from hand to hand—first from the Manchu official Yan Dong at Suzhou to a Belgian man from the tax office at Jiayuguan, the mountain pass near Suzhou, and this Belgian man then offered some of his “numerous scrolls” to officials in Xinjiang, namely General Changgeng and Circuit Intendant Fan. Obviously, Xie’s decades-later reportage of the events must be compared with contemporaneous testimony to confirm accuracy. Historian Rong Xinjiang, for example, says that Xie’s account “does not seem to be unfounded” given Aurel Stein’s corroboration (Rong 2001, trans. 2013: 85, ft. 6).

Aurel Stein indeed makes several points pertinent to understanding the early disposition of Library Cave scrolls in his detailed archaeological report, *Serindia*. For example, he writes that the Library Cave door was walled up as a “precaution” to guard against the curiosity of pilgrims who “had recently flocked to the site in their thousands.”<sup>10</sup> In the below, Stein specifically relates that the Suzhou daotai (ie. Yan Dong) reported the discovery to their superior, the “Viceroy of Gansu,” who in turn ordered some Library Cave scrolls be taken to his Viceregal Yamen at Lanzhou. Stein’s “Viceroy” appears to be Wei Guangdao, who was Governor-General of Shaanxi and Gansu (Shaan-Gan zongdu 陝甘總督, Rank 2a) in 1900 (acting 1899):

From statements heard by us at Dunhuang it had appeared likely that, when the great find of manuscripts had been officially reported through the Daotai at Suzhou to the Viceroy of Gansu, orders had been issued from the latter’s Yamen for the transmission of specimens, and subsequently for the safe keeping of the whole collection... Some rolls of Chinese texts, apparently Buddhist, had indeed been taken from him and sent to the Viceregal Yamen at Lanzhou.<sup>11</sup> But they had failed to attract any interest there, and to Wang’s undisguised chagrin no further notice had been taken of his

treasured old manuscripts or, indeed, of his pious labours which had led to their discovery. Officialdom had been content with a rough statement that the manuscripts would make up seven cart-loads, and, evidently grudging the cost of transport or the trouble of close examination, had left the whole undisturbed in charge of the Daoshi [Wang], as self-constituted guardian of the temple.

Xie Zhiliu’s 1940s oral history thus echoes Aurel Stein’s understanding that Yan Dong, the “Daotai at Suzhou,” was one of the first to know about manuscripts from the Library Cave. Yan’s official report up the chain of command led to orders for the transmission of “some rolls of Chinese texts” from Mogao to Lanzhou, into the hands of the “Viceroy of Gansu” Wei Guangdao. We return later to examine Xie’s other claim that Yan Dong presented a Belgian tax collector with numerous scrolls, and who in turn gave them away to Xinjiang-area officials.

## SERENDIPITY IN SEATTLE

Xie Zhiliu had been invited to Dunhuang by prominent artist Zhang Daqian 張大千 (1899–1983), who was there from 1941 to 1943 on an ambitious project to study the cave murals. Zhang also recorded local recollections related to the Library Cave’s discovery (Li 2001). James C.M. Lo (1902–1987, Luo Jimei 羅寄梅) and his wife Lucy Lo (b. 1920, Liu Xian 劉氏 · 羅先) arrived in 1943. James was a photojournalist for the Central News Agency, and he had taken a year’s leave to photograph Dunhuang. Lucy was also a photographer. Under challenging conditions, the couple produced meticulous photographic documentation of the Mogao caves during their eighteen-month stay.<sup>12</sup>

In 2016, the Seattle Art Museum organized *Journey to Dunhuang: Buddhist Art of the Silk Road Caves* with Princeton University Art Museum (Figure 7). This exhibition presented the interrelated creative activities of James and Lucy Lo: The technical virtuosity and aesthetic sensibility of their photographs; their collection of sutra and paper fragments; and the Lo’s full-scale painted renderings of Dunhuang’s cave murals (Foong 2016). After moving to Taiwan, they produced these renditions in a workshop-like setting by projecting their black-and-white photographs on the wall. The addition of a subtle color palette depended on Lucy Lo’s excellent memory and her meticulous notebook records.<sup>13</sup>

This special exhibition held at the Seattle Asian Art Museum resulted in a lasting impact on the museum’s collection. SAM acquired four Lo workshop renditions (Figure 8) and Lucy Lo later gifted four Buddhist sutra fragments from her collection (Figure 9). In addition, engagement with Seattle’s museum-going community caused, quite unexpectedly, a collector named Yi-chuan Ching to come forward. A respected medical doctor in



**Figure 7** Installation view of *Journey to Dunhuang: Buddhist Art of the Silk Road Caves*, Seattle Asian Art Museum, March 5–June 12, 2016. Photo: Mark Woods.



**Figure 8** *Parable of the Illusory City from the Lotus Sutra*, 1958–63, copy after Mogao Cave 217, Dunhuang, High Tang dynasty (704–781), James C. Lo Workshop. Ink and color on paper, 96 × 127 cm (37 13/16 × 50 in.). Seattle Art Museum, Gift of Lucy L. Lo, 2017.22.1. Photo: Elizabeth Mann.

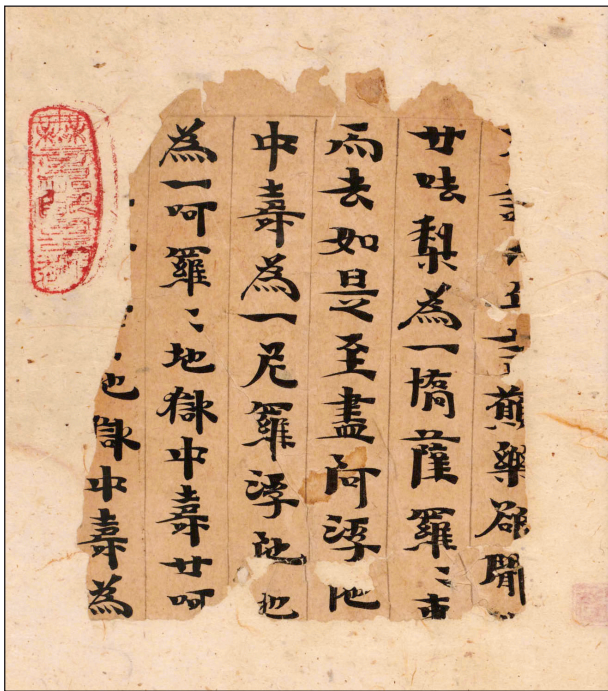
his community, Dr Ching heard about the Lo exhibition from his son Andrew Ching, a Seattle resident, and wrote to the SAM, “I have a page of scripture that may be from the Mogao caves at Dunhuang.”<sup>14</sup> After a year of correspondence and planning, Dr Ching offered it as a gift to SAM, making a plea for the museum to look after the fragment henceforth: “The manuscript probably left China around 1938 and has been in Hawaii in a trunk with moth balls and at ambient temperatures and humidity ever since.”<sup>15</sup> Before SAM could accept his generosity, I undertook necessary steps to establish authenticity and provenance, and to determine whether it was appropriate for this piece to enter the museum’s collection.

## THE SUTRA

The text of this manuscript is a sutra originally compiled before the middle of the sixth century, titled *Datong fang guang chanhui miezui zhuangyan chengfo jing* 大通方廣懺悔滅罪莊嚴成佛經. The name can be translated as “Sutra on the solemn attainment of Buddhahood by means of repentance, to extinguish sins in a great, thorough, and broad way.” This sutra is a manual for calling out to Buddha for salvation. It provides combinations of Buddha’s many names and contains instructions for conducting confession rites to eliminate sins. The repentance ritual must be conducted over seven days without sleep, six times per twenty-four hours, reciting the entire sutra three times a day (Radich 2009). Kuo Li-ying studied records of the forms and practices of various Buddha-name rites, of which Japanese historical texts are particularly rich. For example, the so-called *hōkō-zanka* (Fang guang chan’guo 方廣懺過) rite of confession of 823 CE was celebrated on the twenty-third day of the twelfth moon in Kyoto, when a ritual called *daitsū hōkō-ho* 大通方廢法 was performed all night in a hall of the palace by the great master Kūkai 空海 (774–835).<sup>16</sup>

Based on three Library Cave manuscripts, it became possible to reconstruct three chapters of the “Sutra on the solemn attainment of Buddhahood” (Makita 1976: 290; Ono 1964–1967, vol. 7: 371 b–d).<sup>17</sup> The SAM sutra fragment preserves part of chapter two, and it remains to be seen whether it is of further use to Buddhologists beyond what is already known from the other three manuscripts. Between nine to twelve pieces of this sutra survive and are recorded in catalogues.<sup>18</sup> Indeed the





**Figure 9** Manuscript fragment of *Da zhidu lun* (Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom Sutra), Tang dynasty (618–907), Mogao, Dunhuang. Ink on paper, 11.1 × 9.2 cm (4 3/8 × 3 5/8 in.). Seattle Art Museum, Gift of Lucy L. Lo, 2022.11.1. Photo: Scott Leen.

rarity of extant manuscripts and the sutra's obscurity are both to the benefit of SAM's manuscript since a forger would more likely copy a more popular sutra, like the *Lotus Sutra* or the *Diamond Sutra*, and perhaps even add a date to enhance the value of their forgery.

## THE CALLIGRAPHY

There are several ways of dating a sutra. One is to examine the manuscript's calligraphic style. Another is to check the morphology of the paper sheet. Sutras are copied in order to gain karmic merit. The SAM sutra fragment also shows significant artistry while conforming to the Tang-dynasty imperial standard of *kaishu* 楷書 that was based on the personal hand of court official and imperial curator Chu Suiliang 褚遂良 (596–658). His elegant style was favoured for promulgations and stone stelea at the Tang capital of Chang'an (today's Xi'an), for instance, in "Preface to the holy teachings at Great Goose Pagoda" (*Yanta shengjiao xu* 雁塔聖教序) (Figure 10). This work commemorates the words and deeds of two Tang emperors honoring the Master of the Tripitaka, Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664). It is preserved in the original pair of limestone stelea in situ at the Great Goose Pagoda in Xi'an, and through ink rubbings taken from the stones during the Song dynasty (960–1279). Chu's handwriting is also reflected in many surviving seventh-century clay tablets with a twelve-character inscription in his style stamped on one side, testifying to donors' and imperial



**Figure 10** Chu Suiliang (596–658). Calligraphy for the "Preface to the holy teachings at Great Goose Pagoda" (*Yanta Shengjiao xu*) by Emperor Tang Taizong, Song dynasty (960–1279) rubbing. Album, ink rubbing on paper, 24.5 × 14 cm (9 10/16 × 5 8/16 in.). Tokyo National Museum, TB-1363. With permission from the Integrated Collections Database of the National Museums, Japan <[https://colbase.nich.go.jp/collection\\_items/tnm/TB-1363?locale=zh](https://colbase.nich.go.jp/collection_items/tnm/TB-1363?locale=zh)>.

merit-making.<sup>19</sup> Schooling in this court-calligraphy style was clearly widespread since it was practised by Dunhuang's professional scribes nearly 1500 kilometres (about 900 miles) distant from the Tang capital.

The person who wrote the SAM fragment had sophisticated calligraphic skills: Strokes in each character are compositionally balanced with elements of the more complicated characters knitted together in asymmetry (Figure 11). We detect small finger and wrist movements in the finely flicking and turning brush tip. This liveliness is seen in the dots of *xin* 心. Horizontal strokes vary for visual interest, going from thin to thick and to thin again. The corner turns are executed with drama and flair, yet with firm precision, for example in *chang* 常, and the writer masterfully maintains the same level of brush control even when the characters increase in number within columns and become smaller in size (Figure 12). Brush complexities like these are not semantically necessary; they enhance beauty rather than meaning. More importantly, the calligraphy's features—a supple brush tip, fluctuating stroke widths, sophisticated character structures—decidedly affiliate it with the court style of Chu Suiliang, which in turn creates a connection between



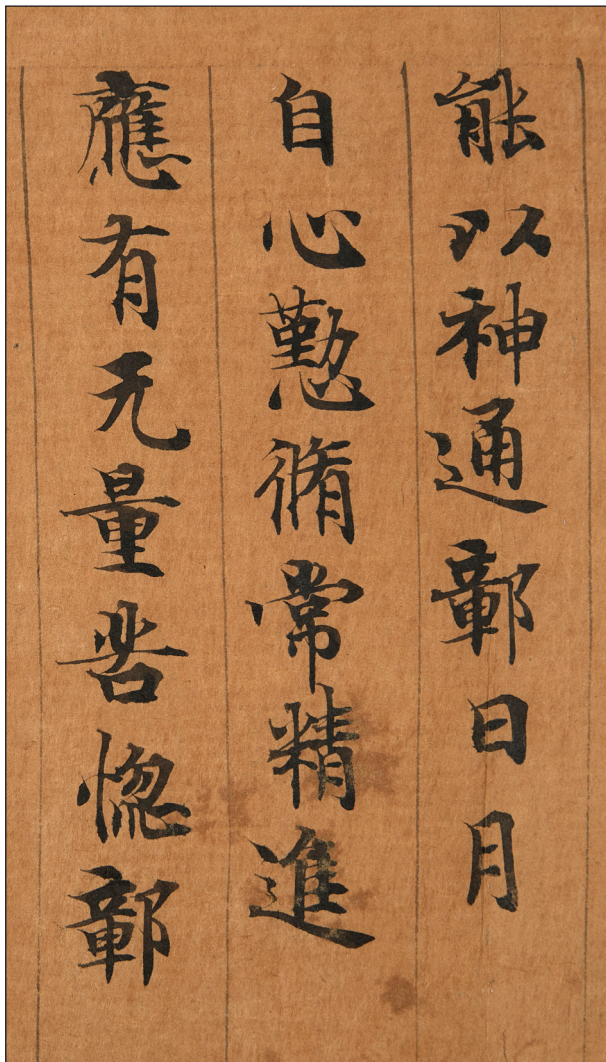


Figure 11 Detail of Figure 4.

the desert oasis of Dunhuang to the cosmopolitan Tang capital at Chang'an.

The same sutra in the British Library's Stein Collection (Or.8210/S.1847) shows a different calligraphic style, one that appears to predate the SAM version. The character compositions are slightly squatter, the brushwork is plumper and less attenuated (eg. *shi* 十), and the flicking brush-tip complexity so prominent in the SAM fragment is not discernable (Figure 13).<sup>20</sup>

## FIBRE TESTING AND PAPER MORPHOLOGY

Dunhuang manuscript forgeries is a major topic of debate. Fujieda Akira 藤枝晃 contends that counterfeits can be identified even in early collections like the Stein Collection at the British Library.<sup>21</sup> While there is no single, foolproof answer to identifying forgeries, scientific testing can be informative. With Dr Yi-chuan Ching's permission, SAM carried out laboratory testing of a sample with the aim of comparing the paper pulp fibre distribution and fibre types with the morphological features of Dunhuang

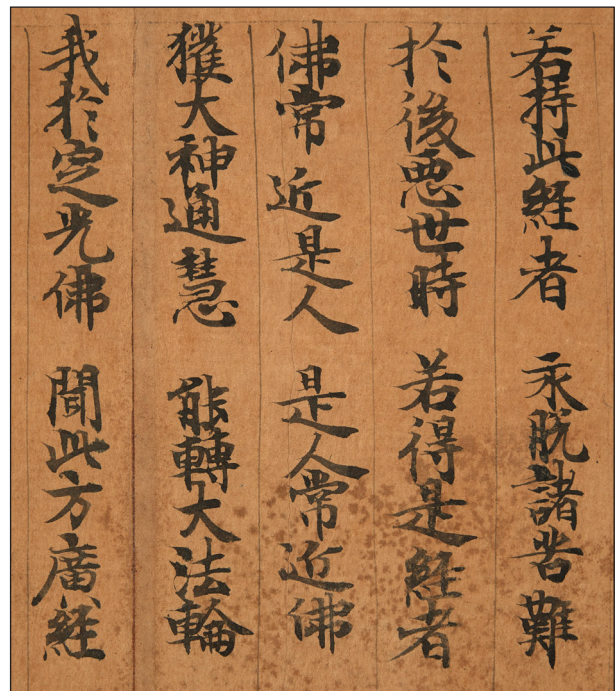


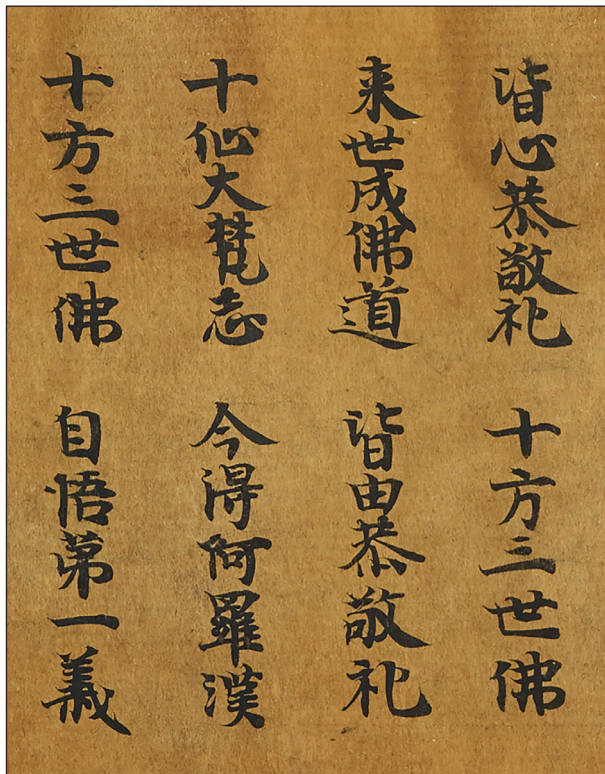
Figure 12 Detail of Figure 4.

manuscripts that have already been studied—eg. those from Stein's first visit to the Mogao caves, which specialists generally agree are authentic.

In 2016, a minute sample (the size of a period “.”) was taken by Geneva Griswold, Conservator at SAM, and forwarded to Debora Dyer Mayer, Conservator of Art and Historic Artifacts on Paper, Mayer Conservation Studio, New Hampshire. The optical microscopy after staining produced photomicrographs imaged at 250× magnification (Figure 14). Mayer determined that nearly all of the fibres are of the Moraceae or Ulmaceae families, which includes paper mulberry (*Broussonetia papyrifera*), white mulberry (*Morus alba*), Tara wingceltis (*Ulmus cavaleriei* H. Lev.), etc. (Mayer 2017). These findings compare to those from papers studied at the British Library, which are composed mainly of either ramie or paper mulberry possibly combined with another bast fibre (Helman-Wazny 2016).<sup>22</sup>

Fujieda Akira and others have shown that, in codicological analysis, numbers of laid and chain lines and small differences in height and width of the paper sheet offer another view into dating. Our analysis used the methodology and statistics on paper sheet morphology of dated Dunhuang papers collated by Jean-Pierre Dregé (2002, Table 1: 140–75). Measurements taken from the SAM fragment indicate it not later than early eighth century, and the height of the paper—being greater than 27 cm even with water-damage losses—suggests that it postdates the British Library manuscript (25.1 cm).<sup>23</sup> Material investigation therefore accords with our previous analysis of calligraphic style for dating, but the SAM fragment awaits future study by codicologists and textual scholars on taboo characters and character orthography.





**Figure 13** Manuscript of *Buddhānāma-sūtra* (Sutra on the names of Buddha), detail. Mogao, Dunhuang (Ch.79.XI.2). Handscroll, ink on paper, 25.1 × 548.64 cm (9.88 × 216 in.). © British Library, Or.8210/S.1847 Recto.



**Figure 14** Fibre analysis of the paper support, viewed in water with fibres in partially crossed polarized light, 250×. Moderate birefringence and prominent transverse “V” and “X” marks typical of bast fibres are visible. From Mayer report for Seattle Art Museum, Figure 7. Courtesy of Debora Dyer Mayer Conservation Studio.

## THE GIFT LETTER

We turn next to the SAM sutra fragment’s provenance. It is important to understand the manuscript’s history of ownership both for ethical reasons and because, in this case, provenance is key to its authenticity. A gift letter composed in English, mounted with the fragment when it came to the SAM, allows us to trace its path after leaving China around the late 1930s (Figure 6). The letter states the scroll came from a “stone room,” and reads:

To Professor Anne Bille,

This is a piece from one of the rolls of Buddhist Scripture copied by persons in the Tang Dynasty. These rolls were preserved in a stone room among the mountains in Tun Wong, Kansu, and had remained undiscovered until the beginning of the Republic.

From Jao Yü Ai

May 15, 1932

Anna Matilda Bille (Bi Lian 畢蓮, 1879–1942) received her B.A. (1907) and M.A. (1909) from Leland Stanford Junior University and served as the first dean of Fullerton Junior College in California until 1916, before relocating to Honolulu (Figure 15). She later took up the offer of her good friend Fook-tan Ching (Chen Futian 陳福田, 1897–1956) to move to China to teach English at Tsinghua University in Beijing (Figure 16). She had been Fook-tan’s English teacher when he was a high school student in Honolulu and clearly made a strong impression on him. They would remain friends over the following decades. Fook-tan Ching’s son, Dr Yi-chuan Ching, who donated the scroll fragment to SAM, remembers meeting Bille as a child in Honolulu (Figure 17). Bille remained at Tsinghua University from 1922 to 1933, teaching Freshman English and supervising higher-level theses.<sup>24</sup> While in Beijing, she published a collection of her poems titled, *Broken Tiles: Poems of China* (Bille 1931).<sup>25</sup> The next year, Jao Yü Ai gave Bille the Dunhuang sutra fragment together with their letter.

After the second Sino-Japanese war (1937–1945) broke out, A.M. Bille returned to Hawaii and, following illness, died in Honolulu in 1942. She left the sutra fragment to Fook-Tan Ching who, by this time, had served as Chair of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature at Tsinghua University three times. He is known for compiling an English language textbook for freshman (Ching 1985, reprinted from 1939) which remains in use today with a bilingual English-Chinese edition (Ching and Luo 2017). The textbook is credited with cultivating a generation of elite academics in liberal arts and sciences such as Yang Zhenning 楊振寧 (Chen-Ning Franklin Yang, b. 1922) and Li Zhengdao 李政道 (Tsung-Dao Lee, b. 1926), joint winners of the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1957. Other famous graduates of Ching’s English-language program include playwright Cao Yu 曹禺 (1910–1996); scholar and author Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書 (1910–1998); and poet Mu Dan 穆旦 (Zha Liangzheng 查良鏞, 1918–1977).

The Tsinghua University campus was a progressive and vibrant environment that cultivated foreign cultural exchange. By 1929, the university had sent 1,280 students



**Figure 15** Anna Matilda Bille (1879–1942). *The Pleiades*, Yearbook of Fullerton Union High School, 1914. Courtesy of the Local History Room, Fullerton Public Library.



**Figure 17** A.M. Bille in Honolulu with Yi-chuan Ching as a child, early 1940s. Courtesy of Yi-chuan Ching.



**Figure 16** Fook-tan Ching (1897–1956) by the faculty building on Tsinghua University campus, 1920s. Courtesy of Yi-chuan Ching.

to study in the United States. At the time, there were nearly twenty professors from the United States, Britain, Germany, Switzerland, Russia, and other countries, teaching foreign languages, history, mechanical engineering, sociology, political science, and western music and literature. A.M. Bille's tenure overlapped with Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), Chinese art historian Gustave Ecke (1896–1971), and many French and American physicists, chemists, and mathematicians.

At age twenty-six in 1923, Fook-tan Ching joined the faculty of Tsinghua after receiving his Master's in Education from Harvard University. Yi-chuan Ching recounts that his father, "like many idealistic second-generation American-Chinese from Hawaii of his time, went off to help build the new Republic."<sup>26</sup> Fook-tan remained at the helm of his department through difficult times during the Sino-Japanese war, "staying the course through bombing and privation...when food allowances were so meager that the teachers were sometimes reduced to eating rats." Tsinghua, along with Peking University and Nankai University (Tianjin), was forced to move from city to city—from Beijing to Changsha, then in 1938 to Kunming in southwest China.<sup>27</sup> According to Yi-chuan, when the pilots of the American Volunteer Group, the AVG or Flying Tigers, arrived, Fook-tan served as their liaison. Later when the United States entered WWII, Fook-tan trained interpreters for General Joseph Stilwell's (1883–1946) officers commanding Chinese troops in Burma (Myanmar). In 1948, when the Communist Party of China was sweeping to victory, Fook-Tan returned to Hawaii. This was six years after A.M. Bille had died.

The biographies of A.M. Bille and Fook-Tan Ching offer us a glimpse into the ownership history of SAM's sutra fragment during the 1930s and 1940s, against the backdrop of historical relations between China and the United States. But who was Jao Yü Ai? They signed their name in romanised form, which gives no indication of the Chinese characters or gender, but the high proficiency in English indicates they were likely Bille's student at Tsinghua University.



## BIOGRAPHY OF A YOUNG WOMAN

This mystery would not be solved without a few key ingredients, foremost being the powerful ability of present-day search engines for locating individuals based on incomplete information: Educated guesswork utilizing Google and Chinese-language search engines returned rich rewards. Good luck was important, but ironically, the 2020 pandemic lockdown and the undisturbed time it afforded for research and reflection was also key.

My first step was to guess at the surname. Jao Yü Ai's cursive handwriting is ambiguous whether spelt J-A-O or R-A-O, and Dunhuang is spelled "Tun Wong" in the letter, which may represent Cantonese pronunciation. I therefore presumed the surname was the same as that of prolific Hong Kong scholar, sinologist, calligrapher, and painter Rao Zongyi 饒宗頤 (1917–2018), commonly romanised as Jao Tsung-i. The given name was a puzzle of greater order.

Searching Rao 饒 plus different characters for Yü eventually revealed the names of several well-known early twentieth-century figures. One of these was Rao Yutai 饒毓泰 (1891–1968) who was a founder of modern physics in China, which led to searching for Rao 饒 plus the Yu 毓 from Rao Yutai's name. This leap of faith in turn revealed the name of one Rao Yu'ai 饒毓菱, eldest daughter of prominent medical doctor Rao Fenghuang 饒鳳璜 (zi Pinqing 聘卿, 1876–1953). Dr Rao's five children (three daughters and two sons) had the same generation name Yu 毓. Rao Yu'ai's international experience stood out to me since she had served as a translator at the All-China Women's Federation (Zhonghua quanguo funü lianhe hui 中華全國婦女聯合會), founded in 1949.<sup>28</sup>

With Rao 饒 and Yu 毓 in hand, I searched for different Ai, beginning with *ai* 愛 knowing that the "fuzzy search" includes equivalent character variations, such as *ai* 菱 and even the visually similar *ling* 菱. Adding Tsinghua University 清華大學 and Foreign Language Department 外文系 to these search terms pointed to a compendium listing all professors and students attending Tsinghua between 1927 and 1949. Rao Yu'ai is listed as a female graduate from the Foreign Languages Department with details of her accomplishments after graduation. I had consulted multiple printed and digital biographical databases, but none mention Rao Yu'ai; our reference sources indeed do not often record the identities of twenty-year-old young women.

After receiving her degree in 1933, Ms Rao became Assistant Professor of History at Peking University (Beijing daxue lishi xi zhujiao 北京大學歷史系助教) from 1942 to 1945. From the 1940s onwards she served as interpreter at many high-level cultural and education meetings and at international conferences. She lived in Europe between 1947 to 1949, and served as staff translator at the Embassy of Greece (Guo min zhengfu zhu Xila dashiguan guanyuan 國民政府駐希臘大使館館員), interpreting twice

in Berlin for the International Women's Federation. (Bolin guoji fulian 柏林國際婦聯). She died in 1981 in Beijing (Su 2004: 132–33).

It is not known when the SAM fragment was segmented into its present form or by whom, but it was probably whilst in circulation as a gift. Dunhuang manuscripts were often cut into shorter segments to serve gift-giving purposes, sometimes with the circumstances recorded by collectors in added colophons.<sup>29</sup> Thanks to her letter dated 1932, we can say with confidence that Rao Yu'ai gifted the SAM fragment to her professor, A.M. Bille, while she was a student at Tsinghua University in Beijing, one year before graduation. Bille bequeathed it to Fook-Tan Ching, her friend and Chair of her department at Tsinghua. Fook-Tan died in 1956, after which it passed to his son Yi-chuan, who generously donated it to SAM in 2017. Rao Yu'ai's gift letter thus lets us trace the manuscript's every step from 1932 to the present (Figure 6).

## THE RAO FAMILY

Assuming Rao Yu'ai had herself received the scroll fragment from a family member, I looked deeper into her family history. Her father Rao Fenghuang, mentioned above, was a medical doctor turned politician. He was also a devout lay-Buddhist and co-sponsored an organization called the *Faxiang yanjiu hui* 法相研究會 (Dharmalakṣaṇa Academy) that promoted teaching, research, translation, and engraving of Buddhist scriptures. The society was established in Beijing in 1921, and one co-founder was Han Qingjing 韓清淨 (1884–1949) who later became president of the society (Chen and Deng 2000: 239).

Ms Rao Yu'ai's grandfather was Rao Yingqi, Provincial Governor of Xinjiang and Gansu (Gansu-Xinjiang *xunfu* 甘肅新疆巡撫, Rank 2b) from 1896 to 1902.<sup>30</sup> By the time of his appointment as the fourth governor, he would have been very familiar with the region having already been posted there for over a decade: As Gansu's Inspector (*ancha shi* 按察使, 1885–88) and Gansu-Xinjiang Tax Administration Commissioner (*buzheng shi* 布政使, 1891–93). In 1902, Rao Yingqi was transferred out of the region to become Anhui provincial governor, but died of illness en route on Jan 16, 1903, at Hami 哈密 in Xinjiang (Figure 18 map).<sup>31</sup>

As the provincial governor of Gansu, Dunhuang was under Rao Yingqi's jurisdiction, and he was in post when Wang Yuanlu discovered the Library Cave. His connection with the Mogao caves has so far been overlooked and promises to be a productive subject for future research. Governor Rao is a central figure in the economic history of the region. He embraced mining and using the province's rich mineral wealth to increase revenue (Kinzley 2018: 50–61; Schluessel 2016: 64–68). By 1898, he and agents of the Russian empire had negotiated for a partnership in a gold mining enterprise in the Katu Mountains, which

yielded nearly forty-four pounds of gold by the autumn of 1900. In contrast to previous governors Liu Jintang 劉錦棠 (1844–1894) and Tao Mo 陶模 (1835–1902), whose policies restricting mining, Rao's willingness to work closely with Russia stood out, especially given the fraught relations between Qing-dynasty China and Russia since the mid-nineteenth century.

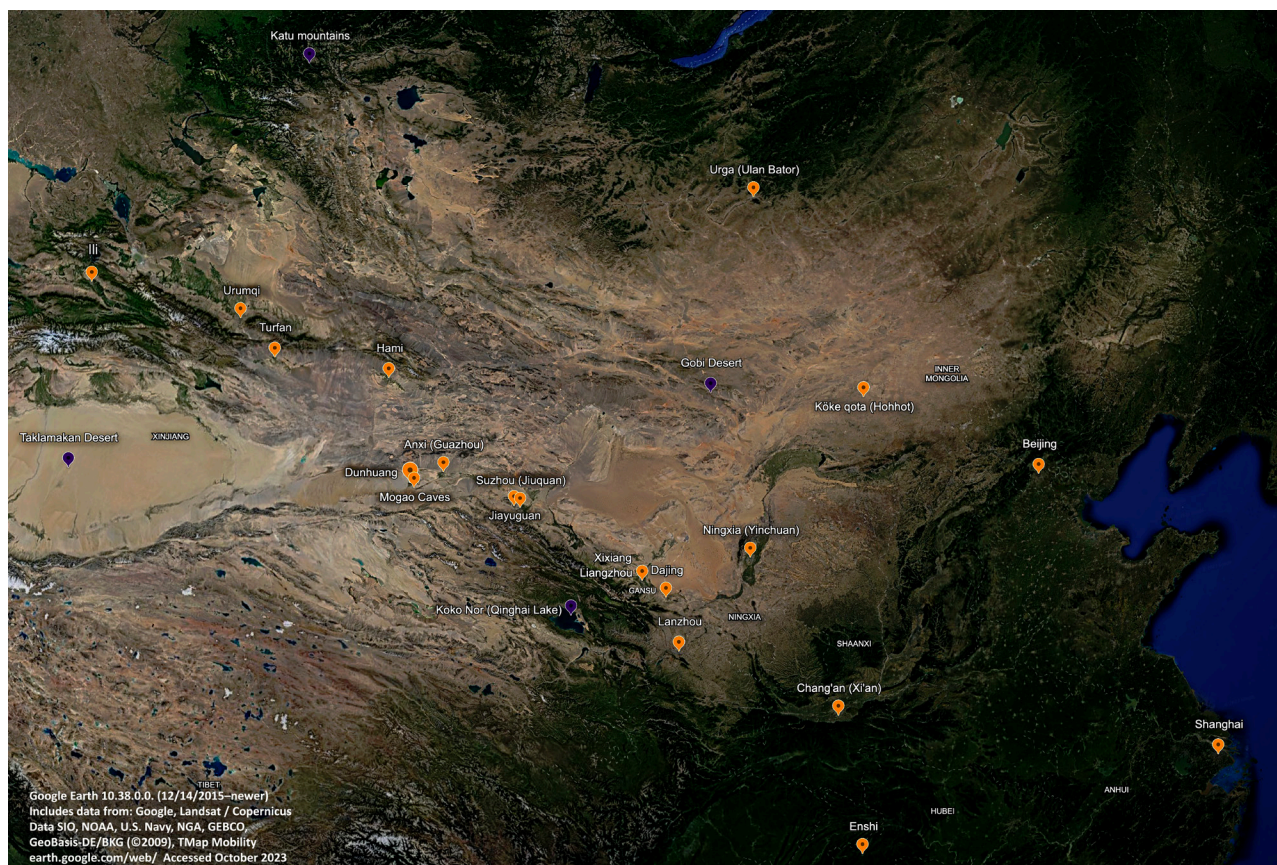
Governor Rao's openness appears in keeping with his cooperative interactions with foreign explorers, such as Aurel Stein and Pyotr Kuzmich Kozlov (1863–1935), the Russian geographer who discovered the Kharakhoto ruins. Indeed, Rao took an active interest in Stein's activities, which were his responsibility. Imre Galambos (2012) discovered an early Chinese translation of Stein's report on his first expedition (1900–1901), the *Preliminary Report of a Journey of Archaeological and Topographical Exploration in Chinese Turkestan* (Stein 1901). The 20,000-word translation was in fact commissioned by Rao, who had obtained a copy of Stein's English report. The governor was clearly eager to know more about Stein's archaeological activities and received the translation by December 1901. A postscript to the translation dated July 1902 records that Rao highly praised both the report and Stein's investigations of antiquities and ancient sites, and scholars interested in antiquities competed for the privilege of reading the translation first.<sup>32</sup>

Rao Yingqi's status and experiences as a government official put him in a position to take an active interest in

the Library Cave. Furthermore, he was known to enjoy cordial relationships with foreigners. As for how Rao acquired the Library Cave sutra scroll which produced the SAM fragment, I believe there are three possible sources and will discuss each one below.

## THE BELGIAN TAX COLLECTOR

Western explorers conducting archaeological work and geographical surveys were already aware of the Mogao caves before 1900. Russian geographer Nikolai M. Przhevalsky (1839–1888), Hungarian geologist Lajos Lóczy (1849–1920), French archaeologist turned diplomat Charles Eudes Bonin (1865–1929), and others had visited Mogao before the Library Cave was discovered (Enoki 1980). Lóczy visited in 1879 and it was he who alerted Stein in 1902 to the existence of the “Caves of the Thousand Buddhas.” Stein wrote: “I had been greatly impressed by his glowing description of the fine fresco paintings and stucco sculptures which he had seen there... It had, in fact, been a main cause inducing me to extend the plans of my expedition so far eastwards into China” (Stein 1912: vol. 2: 20). Indeed Stein mentions “vague rumours” of a deposit hidden in a cave temple, which he heard while in Dunhuang from Zahīd Bēg, a Turkic trader from Urumqi (Stein 1912: vol. 2: 18–19, 586, and 801).



**Figure 18** Map of locations pertaining to Governor Rao Yingqi and Paul Spingaerd, 1900–1903 (Google Earth 10.38.0.0).



Distinguishable from these foreign visitors, Paul Splingaerd (1842–1906, Chinese name: Lin Fuchen 林輔臣) was a long-time resident of Suzhou (today's Jiuquan).<sup>33</sup> He was the “Belgian man from the tax office at Jiayuguan” mentioned in the writings of Xie Zhiliu discussed earlier. Splingaerd had arrived in Mongolia decades earlier to serve the *Congregatio Immaculati Cordis Mariae* (Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, or CICM), the Catholic mission established by papal order in 1862 by the Belgian Roman Catholic priest Theophiel Verbist (1823–1868). Splingaerd maintained contact with members of the order in Mongolia and China. Indeed, letters to and from Scheutists (the Scheut missionaries) of the CICM detail Splingaerd's movements in 1900, and thus enable us to reexamine Xie Zhiliu's decades-later report that Splingaerd gifted sutra manuscripts from the Library Cave to his acquaintances.

Fondly dubbed “The Belgian Mandarin” by many, Splingaerd was a colourful figure whose life inspired characters in at least two novels, including *The Gift* by Vladimir Nabokov (1899–1977). He taught himself Chinese and served as translator and guide for the renowned German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen (1833–1905) during his travels in China between 1868–1872.<sup>34</sup> Von Richthofen popularized the term “Silk Road.”<sup>35</sup> Splingaerd then ran a fur and wool trading

business in Mongolia. He married a Christian Manchu woman, Catherine Li (1846–1918), with whom he had thirteen children.<sup>36</sup>

In 1881, Governor-General Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823–1901) appointed Splingaerd to a post at Suzhou, where he ran a smallpox clinic. He remained there for fourteen years and enjoyed considerable goodwill as a resident and as someone who cared for his adopted community's health and welfare. When he moved to Shanghai in 1896, prominent members of Suzhou offered him farewell gifts, and his name was associated with the town long after he left. On July 22, 1907, Aurel Stein passed through “the former Yamen of Lin Ta-jên, the late Belgian Mandarin Springaert” (Stein 1912, vol. 2: 286). Splingaerd's former residence had been prepared for Stein's quarters at one point during the expedition, but already “shaky and tattered” and “roofs swarming with bats,” the party quickly left for different camping grounds a mile away on Jiuquan temple precincts.

On May 5, 1903, seven years after leaving his Suzhou post, Splingaerd sent a photograph of his family to Ferdinand von Richthofen, his previous employer and friend, for his seventieth birthday. A few years later von Richthofen published it in remembrance of their time together (von Richthofen 1907, vol. 2: 346) (Figure 19).<sup>37</sup> This fascinating photograph was captured at the Sze Yuen



**Figure 19** Family portrait of Paul Splingaerd and Catherine Li with their eleven children, ca. 1903. Photograph taken in Shanghai at the studio of Sze Yuen Ming & Co. Reproduced from von Richthofen (1907), vol. 2: 346.

Ming & Co studio in Shanghai.<sup>38</sup> The group portrait shows Splingaerd and Catherine Li's eleven surviving children, and therefore taken after their daughter Suzanne's (b. 1878) death from cholera in 1895. In the photo are mementos from their Suzhou days, including a canopy with accolades seen at right.

A series of smaller hangings on the wall behind the older children in this family portrait record Splingaerd's titles.<sup>39</sup> Two read: "In charge of commerce, dispatched to the Jiayuguan Customs Office of Taxation, concurrently serving at the Smallpox Bureau" (Banli tongshang, zou pai Jiayu shui guan, jian niudou ju 辦理通商，奏派嘉峪稅關兼牛痘局), definitively confirming Splingaerd as the "Belgian man from the tax office at Jiayuguan" in Xie Zhiliu's 1940s report.<sup>40</sup>

A different photograph, published by Russian geologist and later science fiction writer Vladimir Obruchev (1864–1956), shows Splingaerd and his wife posed with the same wall hangings at the entrance to their Suzhou yamen (Obruchev 1956: Ch 8, cited by Megowan 2019: 171). This yamen was dilapidated by the time Stein passed by in 1907. Comparing the hangings in both photographs, I deduced two additional characters obscured by one of the daughters in the family portrait. In full, the title in the rightmost small hanging reads: "Prefectural Brigade Commander, imperially bestowed with a fancy plume" (Qin ci hualing youfu 欽賜花翎遊府). The term *youfu*, short for *Youji fu shi* 游擊府事, refers to his military title, Rank 3b.

Splingaerd was given permission to wear a peacock feather "flower plume" (*hualing*) hat ornament as part of his official regalia. His oil portrait, painted in Belgium in 1906, depicts him wearing the feather ornament with a red-colored hat-knob *dingdai* 頂戴 denoting his rank (Figure 20).<sup>41</sup> After the Boxer Uprising (1900–1901), he was appointed Prefectural Brigade Commander to pursue indemnities with a squad of armed Chinese soldiers in areas such as Inner Mongolia and Ningxia. The wall hangings in the family portrait therefore summarize Splingaerd's career at Suzhou up to 1896 as well as his duties in the region after 1901.

At first glance, it seems impossible that Splingaerd could have acquired Library Cave scrolls from Circuit Intendant Yan Dong since Splingaerd left Suzhou in 1896, and the Library Cave was not discovered by Wang Yuanlu until 1900.<sup>42</sup> However, the local stories reported by Xie Zhiliu can be elucidated by letters preserved in the CICM archives. These archives contain communications in Dutch and French between Splingaerd and Scheut missionaries such as Father Ivo Lauwaert (1861–1925), appointed Provincial Superior of Gansu in 1898 and in Gansu from 1899 to 1909; Bishop Hubert Otto (1850–1938), Apostolic Vicar of the Gansu mission from 1890; Jeroom Van Aertselaer (1845–1924), head of the apostolic vicariate of Central Mongolia, 1898; and Adolfe Van Hecke (1855–1931), CICM Superior-General, 1898. Their letters



**Figure 20** Portrait of Paul Splingaerd (1842–1906), dated 1906. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of Anne Megowan Splingaerd.

document many details about the months framing Wang Yuanlu's discovery, on the eve of the Boxer Uprising.<sup>43</sup>

The following investigates the likelihood that the SAM sutra fragment came from a scroll that passed through Splingaerd's hands. Since his activities and movements throw light on the Library Cave's early period of dispersal, I will therefore present them in detail.

## EVE OF THE BOXER UPRISING

The Boxer Uprising was a revolt against Western imperialism and a watershed moment in the history of China. Anti-foreign and anti-Christian action had gained momentum earlier in Shandong province and violence spread across the country. The Uprising ended in defeat by the Eight-Nation alliance and the Qing government's realization it must modernize to be on equal footing with the West. The Boxer Protocol peace treaty signed September 1901 was punitive in its demands and claimed financial compensation for the attacks on Westerners and the destruction of their property. Paul Splingaerd was caught between worlds—as a Belgian Catholic who served as a Qing-dynasty official, as husband of a Manchu Christian and father of bi-racial Chinese-Belgian children, and as ally of foreigners and missionaries. After the Uprising, he became an arbiter



pursuing indemnification in Gansu and Mongolia, in accordance with the treaty terms.

In 1898, King Leopold II of Belgium sent an expedition to buy land and establish a village in Gansu province. Spilingaerd was engaged as attaché of the Independent State of Congo (today's Democratic Republic of the Congo) to accompany a group led by Colonel Gaspart-Eduard Fivé (1849–1909) and two engineers surnamed Henrard and Ledent.<sup>44</sup> Their mission was to prospect at Anxi 安西 in northwestern Gansu, not far from the border of Xinjiang, where they hoped to discover reserves of quartz and gold. I have summarized the key movements of this group between 1900 and 1901, which shows they were in Anxi and Suzhou around June or July 1900 (Table 1 and Figure 18 map).<sup>45</sup>

Colonel Fivé and Spilingaerd arrived in Lanzhou in February 1900. After their first venture to Koko Nor failed due to bad weather conditions,<sup>46</sup> they went to Suzhou and Anxi at the end of May and remained in northern Gansu until the end of July.<sup>47</sup> Spilingaerd was therefore in the area when the Library Cave was discovered on June 22. Given that he lived in Suzhou for fourteen years and was well-connected, it is probable that he was already acquainted with Yan Dong and called on Yan as the Fivé party traveled through the area in June and July.

From the letter cited below, I also ascertain that Fivé's group prospected at least four days beyond Suzhou and then reached Turfan in Xinjiang province. Indeed, with

this new information, Xie Zhiliu's account now seems very plausible: That Spilingaerd received Library Cave pieces as gifts from Yan Dong, and then regifted them to General Changgeng and Circuit Intendent Fan after arriving at Turfan.

Hearing that the Boxer Uprising was gaining momentum, Colonel Fivé and Spilingaerd hurried back to Lanzhou, via Liangzhou.<sup>48</sup> There is an immediacy about the CICM letters of this period, as in the letter from Rev. Ivo Lauwaert to the Superior-General, Adolf Van Hecke, dated August 3, 1900:

Messrs Fivé, Henrard, Ledent & Spilingaerd who returned here from **Anxi zhou** 安西州 [Turfan]<sup>49</sup> and Suzhou on July 30 and rested here for 3 days, wanted to send a coded dispatch to Europe via Ili [Yili 伊黎]. The Liangzhou telegraph station refused to send it. They also refuse to send telegrams in Chinese if the telegrapher does not quite grasp the meaning. All that means something. These gentlemen seem weary of Gansu and are **in a hurry to return to Europe**. They say that apart from the oil reserves **four days beyond Suzhou**, they have found nothing of interest, and if we exploited the source, we would not find flowing oil. They are of the opinion to leave Lanzhou for Beijing through Mongolia at the beginning of September. They will take advantage of the camels which we will send to fetch the new confrères and will travel by Leh'ao under your tents. Paul Spilingaerd will accompany them. Mr. Fivé hopes to request an audience with the emperor, and he wants to have Paul as an interpreter. He mistrusts the Belgian minister in Beijing and his entourage. Paul will probably take Catherine with him because he is afraid to leave her here alone under the current circumstances. Will he return to Lanzhou? Fivé says yes, Paul has a contract for five years.<sup>50</sup>

Mr. Fivé, Henrard, Ledent & Spilingaerd qui sont revenus ici de **Gnan si tcheou** et Su-tcheou le 30 Juillet et qui se sont reposés ici pendant 3 jours, ont voulu envoyer une dépêche chiffrée en Europe par Ili. Au télégraphe de Leang-tcheou on a refusé de l'envoyer, on refuse également d'envoyer des télégrammes en Chinois si au télégraphe on saisit pas bien le sens. Tout cela veut dire quelque chose. Ces messieurs paraissent las du Kan-sou et sont pressés de retourner en Europe. Ils disent qu'en dehors des sources à pétrole, à quatre journées au delà de Su-tcheou, ils n'ont trouvé rien d'intéressant, encore, si on exploitait la source, ne trouverait on pas de débit pour le pétrole. Ils sont d'avis de partir de Lan-tcheou pour Peking à travers la Mongolie commencement de septembre. Ils profiteront des chameaux que

YEAR	DATE	ITINERARY
1900	Feb 17	Spilingaerd travels from Beijing and arrives in Lanzhou, capital of Gansu province, with Colonel Fivé and their party.
	May 17	Spilingaerd and Fivé travel to Koko Nor in Qinghai but bad weather forces them to return to Lanzhou.
	May 29	They depart from Xixiang for Suzhou and Anxi in northern Gansu.
	<b>Jun 22</b>	<b>Wang Yuanlu and worker Yang discover the Library Cave at Mogao.</b>
	Jul 30	Spilingaerd and Fivé return to Xixiang following Suzhou and Anxi. They found only oil reserves, not quartz or gold as hoped.
	Aug 10	Spilingaerd and Fivé arrive back at Lanzhou.
	Sep 7	On the eve of the Boxer Uprising, there were calls to "kill all Europeans." Spilingaerd and Fivé escape to Mongolia via Dajing in Gansu.
	Nov 12	Fivé and party arrive in Mongolia at Urga (today's Ulan Bator), then travel on the Trans-Siberian Railway for Europe, leaving Spilingaerd behind in Urga.
	Dec 12	Fivé and party arrive in Cologne, Germany.
1901	May 10	Spilingaerd is summoned back from Urga to Gansu by the Belgian government. He arrives at Ningxia (today's Yinchuan) in July.

**Table 1** Expedition timeline of Colonel Gaspart-Eduard Fivé with Paul Spilingaerd.

nous enverrons prendre les nouveaux confrères et voyageront par leh'ao ti sous la tente. Paul Splingaerd les accompagnera. Mr. Fivé est d'avis de demander une audience à l'empereur et veut avoir Paul pour interprète. Il se défie du ministre belge à Peking et de son entourage. Paul prendra probablement Catherine avec lui parce qu'il a peur de la laisser ici toute seule dans les circonstances actuelles. Reviendra-t-il à Lan-tcheou? Fivé dit que oui, il a d'ailleurs un engagement pour 5 ans.

Xie Zhiliu's 1940s report therefore concurs with Ivo Lauwaert's observation that Fivé's party was weary and "in a hurry to return to Europe." Splingaerd describes a palpable sense of threat, with signs everywhere they went calling for attacks on all Europeans.<sup>51</sup> By the time the party arrived at Lanzhou a week later, on August 10, the city was in ferment. In an interview from 1906, recalling a harrowing moment in Lanzhou, Splingaerd said that he felt that the company's safety in Lanzhou was assured in no small part due to his personal efforts and close connection to local officials: "I went to the Governor and the high mandarins and had a conversation with them."<sup>52</sup> His wife Catherine Li, being Christian, was exposed to danger but he had to leave her behind, to his "greatest sorrow." Li was given protection by the governor's wife when Splingaerd left in haste for Mongolia on September 7, escorting Fivé and party to safety.<sup>53</sup>

Local government-officer titles are complex and translations not always consistent. The 1906 interview with Splingaerd referred to his conversation with "the Governor." While Governor Rao Yingqi may have been among the "high mandarins" present for the conversation, the person that Splingaerd met at Lanzhou was more likely Wei Guangdao, Governor-General of Shaanxi and Gansu (Shaan-Gan zongdu 陝甘總督, Rank 2a), who held the highest military and political position in the northwest region and whose wife took Catherine Li into safety. In most Western-language sources—including Stein's writings and CICM letters—Wei Guangdao is mostly referred to as a viceroy. The Scheutists sometimes refer to him by surname as "The Honorable Wei," or as the "new Governor" after his appointment as Governor-General in 1900 (acting by 1899).<sup>54</sup>

Having settled their affairs at Lanzhou with Governor-General Wei Guangdao and other officials present at the meeting, Fivé's party left for Dajing 大靖 on September 7 (Figure 18 map). There, they picked up a caravan of twenty camels that the CICM mission had purchased for their use and traversed the Gobi Desert.<sup>55</sup> With the escort of a Mongolian border Prince, they eventually arrive on November 12 at Urga (Ch. Kulun 庫倫; today's Ulan Bator).<sup>56</sup> Hoping to reunite with Catherine Li who he had to leave behind, Splingaerd remained in Urga while the rest of the group returned to Europe via the Trans-Siberian

railway. According to Rev. Jan-Baptist Steenackers (1848–1928), Splingaerd's friend and godfather to son Jean-Baptiste, he wanted to follow the party to Europe:

The latter [Splingaerd], as soon as he reached the frontiers of Siberia, was eager to push to Europe. But worry about his family kept him in Urga until the end of the Boxer regime. After several months of painful waiting, he was finally able to cross the Mongolian steppe again, join his wife, and take her back to her beloved children.<sup>57</sup>

Celui-ci, dès qu'il eut atteint les frontières de Sibérie, désirait beaucoup pousser une pointe jusqu'en Europe. Mais l'inquiétude au sujet des siens le retint à Ourga jusqu'à la fin du régime des Boxers. Après plusieurs mois d'attente pénible, il put enfin franchir à nouveau la steppe mongole, rejoindre sa femme et la reconduire auprès de ses enfants chéris.

Uniquely positioned to resolve delicate and complex quarrels with foreigners and missionaries, he was recalled by Belgium from Urga and appointed by the Chinese government as Prefectural Brigade Commander (Youji fu shi) to pursue post-Boxer indemnities.<sup>58</sup> Also according to Rev. Steenackers, Splingaerd spent months fulfilling his mandate "through the two vicariates of central and southwestern Mongolia, stopping only at Lanzhou." The photograph of Splingaerd and his family, with the small hanging showing his Prefectural Brigade Commander title, was probably taken at the Sze Yuen Ming studio after his mandate was completed, and the family was reunited in Shanghai (Figure 19).

Splingaerd would not visit Europe until 1906, when he and son Jean-Baptiste arrived in Antwerp on January 25, on board the German cruiser SMS *Prinz Heinrich*.<sup>59</sup> It was his first time in Belgium since arriving in Mongolia in 1865.<sup>60</sup> He died on July 28 after returning to China, while traveling back to Gansu with Catherine Li and daughters.

## RAO YINGQI'S LIBRARY CAVE SCROLL

The oral history recorded by Xie Zhiliu in the 1940s can therefore be confirmed and corrected using the letters of Paul Splingaerd and the Scheut missionaries, together with Aurel Stein's official and personal accounts. Based on the timeline that these sources allow us to recreate, I propose Splingaerd as a probable source for Governor Rao Yingqi's scroll from which the SAM fragment originated. However, there are other plausible scenarios given which of Rao's colleagues and acquaintances gained early access to the Library Cave's contents.



## WEI GUANGDAO

One possible source for Governor Rao's scroll is Governor-General (or Viceroy) Wei Guangdao. According to Stein, monk-caretaker Wang Yuanlu visited Yan Dong with a crate of Library Cave materials, and Yan reported the visit to the Governor-General. Wei Guangdao then ordered Wang to deliver "some rolls of Chinese texts" to his official residence, the Viceregal Yamen in Lanzhou. Therefore, Wei had those specimens to offer to others of his circle.

Furthermore, Governor-General Wei was the highest-ranking official at the August 1900 meeting when Splingaerd made a plea for safe passage for Colonel Fivé's party, and it was Wei's wife who had provided Catherine Li refuge. It is possible that Splingaerd brought Library Cave scrolls to the meeting as mementos to share—souvenirs from their tour and a friendly gesture to sooth tensions. However, it remains to be confirmed whether Governor Rao Yingqi was amongst the "high mandarins" present at the meeting.

## AISIN GIORO ZAILAN

Another possible source is Manchu prince Aisin Gioro Zailan, who owned Dunhuang manuscripts. For his support of the Boxers, he was reduced to commoner status and exiled in disgrace to Ili (Yili 伊犁), a town in far-west Xinjiang, in February 1901.<sup>61</sup> Before reassignment in 1902, Governor Rao Yingqi furnished the former prince with a generous stipend from the treasury for living expenses and entertainment. Zailan was at the centre of a social network that frequently made gift exchanges, and indeed it was his gift of two Tang-dynasty Buddhist sutra manuscripts to Paul Pelliot in 1908 that alerted Pelliot to the Library Cave (Akiyama 1953: 64).<sup>62</sup> Zailan wrote in a letter to Pelliot that his study of "forgotten Dunhuang manuscripts" would brilliantly stun the world and "contribute to the progress of humanity and shine a glorious light on our frontier landscape" (Jacobs 2020: 108).<sup>63</sup>

## PAUL SPLINGAERD

The Library Cave was discovered in June 1900 and the SAM sutra fragment was likely among the pieces in the crate that Wang Yuanlu took to Yan Dong in Suzhou. From the CICM letters, we know Splingaerd passed by Suzhou in June 1900. We also confirmed that Colonel Fivé's party reached Turfan by July. Therefore, Xie Zhiliu's descriptions that Yan Dong collegially offered Splingaerd "numerous scrolls" from his large stash in Suzhou, which Splingaerd then regifted in Xinjiang—both match with Splingaerd's travel itinerary. The European correspondence also corroborates 1940s recollections of Splingaerd's hurried escape to Mongolia and eagerness to return to Europe.

It therefore appears likely that Governor Rao Yingqi's Library Cave scroll(s) came from Splingaerd. The gift exchange happened either after Fivé's group arrived in Turfan in July, or their paths may have crossed in

Lanzhou in August. It is also possible that the Xinjiang officials General Changgeng and Circuit Intendent Fan passed along their Splingaerd scrolls to Governor Rao in Urumqi.

Splingaerd and Rao certainly knew each other in an official capacity—Splingaerd as tax officer at Jiayuguan (1881–1896), and Rao as Gansu's Inspector (*ancha shi*, 1885–1888) and Gansu-Xinjiang Tax Administration Commissioner (*buzhengshi*, 1891–1893). There is evidence of this relationship in an account by the Swedish explorer Sven Hedin (1865–1952), in spring 1896. Hedin had hoped, but failed, to meet Splingaerd to deliver greetings from Ferdinand von Richthofen (Hedin 1899: vol. 2, Ch. 7, 905–906):

Splingaert and Shi Darin had been sent by the **governor-general at Urumchi** to make a journey of inspection through East Turkestan [northwest Xinjiang], more particularly to inquire into the existence of gold in the mountains on the southern borders of the country. Thus they were staying in Khotan at the same time that I was wandering about the forests of Buksem. When they reached Kashgar I had just started for the Pamirs; and when I returned to Kashgar in the autumn they had already left.

Here, the "governor-general at Urumchi" refers to Governor Rao Yingqi as the one to send Splingaerd on an inspection-prospecting tour.<sup>64</sup> There is further proof of their familiarity in Rao Yingqi's archives, with almost 7000 documents published in 38 volumes. On December 3, 1895, Splingaerd sent an emergency telegram to the Turfan Bureau (Tulufan ting 吐鲁番廳) requesting transportation: "My cart broke! My luggage is heavy and it is difficult to proceed with only two. Please send one more cart." The request was approved by Governor Rao himself in a handwritten note.<sup>65</sup>

No matter through which exact path, one scroll must have come into Rao Yingqi's possession by the end of 1902. By then, Governor Rao would have packed the family's belongings in preparation for moving to his new post in Anhui. After Rao's death enroute, his widow, neé Wang 王 (d. 1914), took the family directly to their hometown in Enshi 恩施, Hubei province. She buried him there, and in 1904, founded a school in his memory.<sup>66</sup>

When the Library Cave was discovered, Governor Rao's son Rao Fenghuang was already in his late twenties; he likely knew about the discovery and the origins of the scroll that he inherited. He then imparted this knowledge to his daughter Rao Yu'ai, who honored A.M. Bille, her English professor at Tsinghua University, with a gift of one segment of the scroll and the note saying that it "came from a stone room at Tun Wong." This was no mere flourish of expression; it was a statement of fact!

## A DUNHUANG SCROLL TRAVERSES REALMS

In conclusion, the biography of the SAM sutra fragment from the Library Cave at Dunhuang is unique. We can follow its footsteps for almost 120 years—from the Library Cave discovery in 1900 to 2017 when it entered the Seattle Art Museum collection. Except for the top edge of water damage, remarkably, it survived intact. It evaded the Boxer Uprising of 1900 and the Sino-Japanese war of 1937. The fragment survived the humidity of Hawaii for nearly eighty years, since 1938, and the paper's berberine-dye insect repellent (Gibbs and Seddon 1998) remained efficacious against tropical insects even after more than a thousand years.

The SAM sutra fragment came from a Library Cave scroll that traversed epistemological realms: the sutra was created as a religious text in the eighth century but then ultimately stored inside the Library Cave. Over a millennium later, it was one of the first scrolls to emerge from the sealed cave, passing from hand to hand—from Wang Yuanlu to Yan Dong, and finally to Rao Yingqi, probably via Paul Spingaerd. Thus the sutra was re-conceptualized as a memento or souvenir before it was cut into segments, probably also for gift-giving purposes. The scroll then traversed geographic realms by migrating from Dunhuang to Enshi, then to Beijing. The fragment endured its transnational journey to Honolulu, and finally to Seattle, after the 2016 exhibition of James and Lucy Lo's work at Dunhuang in the 1940s inspired Yi-chuan Ching to offer the fragment as a donation to the museum.

At present, the fragment's status is as an art object in a museum collection. It appeared to the public for the reopening of the Seattle Asian Art Museum in February 2020 following a major renovation project—that is, one month before Covid-19 forced the country to shut down. Unprecedented pandemic closures and emergency circumstances afforded the time and online resources needed to investigate this artefact's provenance and historical context, fortuitously preserved in Rao Yu'ai's identity from her letter to Prof A.M. Bille.

The above study of the SAM sutra fragment significantly illuminates the period of the Library Cave's early dispersal by recovering the heretofore unknown connection between Paul Spingaerd and Governor Rao Yingqi. While the people and places related to the Rao family and Spingaerd are absorbing, future research and interpretation remains to be done, for example, on the vermilion seal impressed three times on the verso, and which I will explicate on a different occasion.

## NOTES

- 1 Fujieda Akira 藤枝晃 (1966: 30) mentions that almost half of the manuscripts were in Chinese and the other half in Tibetan; the other languages were much fewer in number. The earliest manuscript is dated 406 CE and the latest is dated 1002 CE, see Fujieda (1969: 17).
- 2 For an overview of scholarly debate on the possible functions of this repository and when the cave was sealed, see van Schaik and Galambos (2012: 18–28) cf. Rong (1997). The term “Library Cave” is commonly used, whereas the broader designation of “Cave 17” can represent multiple purposes and reasons behind the accumulation of its contents.
- 3 An exemplary study on the earliest Dunhuang-area figures associated with the Library Cave's contents is by Rong Xinjiang 榮新江 (2001, trans. 2013). My study relies on Rong's Lecture 3, “The discovery of the Dunhuang cave library and its early dispersal,” 79–108.
- 4 Rong (2001, trans. 2013): 101–102.
- 5 Generous colleagues provided me with their expertise and assistance in this project, particularly Imre Galambos, Justin Jacobs, Helen Wang, Michelle C. Wang, Susan Whitfield, and two anonymous peer reviewers. While I incorporated their insights, any inaccuracies and conclusions made are my own. I also thank Mimi Gardner Gates, Christian Hudak, and Julia Grimes at the Dunhuang Foundation for their invitation to present this project's initial findings, “A Gift to the Governor: The Story of a Scroll from Dunhuang,” November 19, 2020, in the lecture series titled, “Religions of the Silk Roads.”
- 6 Ye (2002): 688, *juan* 11, 1903/11/12 (December 30). See the translation by Imre Galambos in Rong (2001, trans. 2013): 89–90.
- 7 Without official biographies, the identities of the three officials are difficult to flesh out beyond their names, origins, and postings in Gansu. See Wang Jiqing's (2008/03) study of Zhang Yuanchan and interactions with his colleague Ye Changchi. Wang Jiqing (2016) further contends that they too obtained their scrolls from County Magistrate Wang Zonghan.
- 8 Ye (2002): 688, *juan* 11, 1904/09/05 (October 13). Translated by Imre Galambos in Rong (2001, trans. 2013): 91.
- 9 Xie (1949): 3. Translation by Imre Galambos in Rong (2001, trans. 2013): 85, modified.
- 10 Stein (1921), vol. 2: 803–804. Adapted with *pinyin* transliteration from the digitized pages: <http://dsr.nii.ac.jp/toyobunko/VIII-5-B2-9/V-2/page/0285.html.en>.
- 11 See Stein (1921), vol. 2: 802, for another mention of the viceroy's order for specimens to be brought to Lanzhou.
- 12 An invaluable record of the Mogao caves prior to the Cultural Revolution, the multivalent significances of the Lo photographic archive are explored in a recent nine-volume publication (Lo & Lo and Ching 2021).
- 13 Illustrated in Lo & Lo and Ching (2021), vol. 1: 54–55, figs. 16 and 17.
- 14 Letter from Yi-chuan Ching, dated May 2, 2016.
- 15 Personal email correspondence from Yi-chuan Ching to Foong Ping, dated July 2, 2016.
- 16 Kuo (1994): 139, ft. 54, for sources on the rite conducted in Kyoto in 823 CE. I am grateful to Michelle C. Wang of Georgetown University for alerting me to this scholarship.
- 17 Cited Kuo (1994): 138–141, see 138–39 and ft. 53. The complete sutra is lost and the three reconstructed chapters are Takakusu et al. (1924–34), *Taishō* T. 2871, vol. 85: 1338c–1355c. According to Kuo Li-ying, the first of the three surviving *juan* is based on a manuscript, likely from Dunhuang, belonging to scholar Bunzaburō Matsumoto 松本文三郎 (1869–1944) who is credited with editing the Japanese Tripiṭaka and became president of Kyoto University. The second chapter is a manuscript from the Otani University collection dated 590 CE. The third chapter is based on the Stein collection scroll (Or.8210/S.1847), discussed below, evaluated against one copied in 731 CE and preserved in Japan.
- 18 Shi (2000): 8, notes nine copies including two Stein collection manuscripts (Or.8210/S.1847 and S.0538). Also see Huang (1986): 19, 66, 268, 613, 627 (×2), 628 (×3), 629, 878, 932, totaling twelve instances: one of chapter one; six of chapter two; four of chapter three; one unidentified.
- 19 Clay tablets with a twelve-character inscription in Chu Suiliang's calligraphy style, or *shanyeni* 善業泥, were first rediscovered in 1839 in vicinity of the Great Goose Pagoda at the Great Cí'en monastery (Da Cí'en sì 大慈恩寺). Foong (2022) argues that stamps for imprinting clay tablets with Chu's style were commissioned as part of a series of imperial projects honoring



- Xuanzang. This included encomiums authored by two emperors, written by Chu Suiliang, and carved by Wan Wenshao 萬文韶 (7th century) on two black limestone steles. The stones were erected inside the Great Goose Pagoda, itself built as a monument and repository for the images and texts brought back by Xuanzang from his travels.
- 20 The entire scroll is reproduced in the International Dunhuang Project image database, [http://idp.bl.uk/database/oo\\_loader.a4d?pm=Or.8210/S.1847](http://idp.bl.uk/database/oo_loader.a4d?pm=Or.8210/S.1847).
  - 21 For some issues surrounding copies and forgeries, see essays in Whitfield (2002a). For a summary, see Whitfield (2002b): 1–5, and Sims-Williams (2002): 6–8.
  - 22 For a study of Tibetan paper fibres combined with other modes of analysis, see Helman-Wazny & van Schaik (2013).
  - 23 Details are available upon request. Measurements were taken in 2022 by Geneva Griswold and Foong Ping, assisted by Caitlyn Fong, SAM Emerging Museum Professional Conservation Intern, and Samantha Companatico, Emerging Arts Leader Intern. Since no original side edge is preserved, the paper width cannot be measured more precisely.
  - 24 For A.M. Bille's career at Tsinghua University and the names of other foreign educators, see Su (2000): 299 and 132. According to Cai Degui (2011): Chapter 3, Bille had done relevant research at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark.
  - 25 Chang (1988): 99.
  - 26 Personal email correspondence from Yi-chuan Ching to Foong Ping, dated July 2, 2016.
  - 27 For a history of Tsinghua University before the Sino-Japanese War, see Su (2000).
  - 28 Rao (2009): Ch. 18, 320, records the names of Rao Fenghuang's children.
  - 29 Colophons are an important resource to examine the values that original donors and later collectors endowed their Dunhuang sutra scrolls. Fujieda Akira (1966: 9) wrote that Buddhist scrolls with colophons in National Library of China were fewer in number than collected in Paris and London. According to Justin M. Jacobs, the earliest modern-period colophon appended on a Dunhuang manuscript that survives within China is dated to 1910 (Jacobs 2020: 98–101). He argues that Library Cave artifacts were at this time not yet conceived as priceless treasures of the nation, and instead represented opportunities to build social, political, and economic capital (Jacobs 2020: 113–114).
  - 30 The first three governors were Liu Jintang 劉錦棠 (1844–1894), in post 1884–1889; Wei Guangdao, 1889–1890; and Tao Mo 陶模 (1835–1902), 1890–1895. Rao Yingqi was acting governor in 1895 and became governor in 1896. We later discuss Wei Guangdao after he is appointed to this region's top post as governor-general (Aurel Stein uses viceroy).
  - 31 Rao Yingqi's official career is recorded in *Draft History of the Qing dynasty* 清史稿, see Zhao (1977), vol. 41: 12524–12528. Also see CBDB (2020): 0057835.
  - 32 Galambos (2012): 57–58. The postscript was by one Wan Rong 萬榮, dated July 1902.
  - 33 The transliteration of names represents one difficulty encountered this project. Paul's surname is written many ways, for instance Springaert (Stein 1912) and Splingerdt (Mannerheim 1969). Modern studies in Dutch and English and his descendants use various spellings: Spilingaerd, Spilingaert, Spilingart, etc. In Chinese, Paul is most often Lin Daren (Lin Ta-jên or Lin Darin), the Honorable Lin, but we also find Lin Balu, Lin Baoluo, Bilishi Lin, and sometimes Sipulin Ge'erde 斯普林格爾德. Further, Spilingaerd was not the only Lin Daren in Gansu; Stein had many dealings with a different Honorable Lin during his second expedition. Spilingaerd's Chinese surname was pronounced Ling in Inner Mongolia; this is recorded in Mongolian-language letters.
  - 34 See Wardenga (2007) on Ferdinand von Richthofen and German geography. For Paul Spilingaerd's friendship with von Richthofen see Jäkel (2005a), Jäkel (2005b), and Wu (2015): 108–109.
  - 35 "Silk Road" is a term often attributed to von Richthofen but was in use before him, Waugh (2010), Chin (2013), and Mertens (2019).
  - 36 Spilingaerd's descendants today live in seventeen countries including China, United States, Canada, and Venezuela, and the family remains deeply connected to their roots. The family historian Christian Goen (2019, June 9) collated materials about Paul and the family tree in French. The great-granddaughter, Anne Megowan Spilingaerd, currently manages [Spilingaerd.net](http://Spilingaerd.net) (2013, April 16). She authored two biographies of Paul, Megowan Spilingaerd (2008) and (2019). The latter is a self-published book that Ms Megowan kindly made available to me.
  - 37 Dieter Jäkel (2005a) confirms this was for von Richthofen's seventieth birthday. Christian Goens (2019, April 10) reproduces the photograph owned by Roberta Forte, Italy, and discusses the objects each child holds in this group portrait. Another print preserves the Sze Yuen Ming studio's frame, see Tong (2017): 2–1–12.
  - 38 Also known as the Yao Hua Studio (Shang yang yao hua zhaoxiang 上洋耀華照相), active from 1892 to the 1920s.
  - 39 Xie Shengbao 謝生保 and Zhao Chongmin 趙崇民 were first to notice the wall hangings in this photograph. They conjecture Spilingaerd visited Yan Dong between 1903 to 1906, Xie and Zhao (2001): 172; my translation.
  - 40 The largest characters refer to Spilingaerd's contributions to health care, presumably at the Smallpox Bureau, "Eliminating toxins for universal benefit" (ling dan bo ji 靈丹博濟), and well-wishes to von Richthofen, "May your longevity and domain be vast and grand" (shou yu hong kai 壽域宏開) and "May your year be full of virtue" (hou de yan nian 厚德延年).
  - 41 Different materials were stipulated for the hat knobs of civil and military officers: the insignia for military Rank 3 is blue sapphire, so it is unclear why Spilingaerd wears a red knob. When Emil C.G. Mannerheim met Spilingaerd's son Alphonse as Chinese interpreter at a dinner party, he wrote about Paul, "a very well-known Belgian" who died recently as a "mandarin with a red knob." See Mannerheim (1969): 514. The original oil painting and its pair, a portrait of Catherine Li, now hangs at the home of their great-grandson Peter Spilingaerd and his wife Hon. Alice Wright in Phoenix, Arizona.
  - 42 Wang Jiqing (2008/06) raises the possibility that Yan Dong did not serve as Anxi-Suzhou Circuit Intendant until 1906 and was not the first recipient of scrolls from the Library Cave.
  - 43 The A-CICM, or Archives of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary were moved from Rome and now maintained at KADOC—Documentation and Research Centre for Religion, Culture and Society in Leuven, Belgium. See Vanysacker (1995) for an inventory.
  - 44 A-CICM P.I.a.1.2.5.9.2, Paul Spilingaerd to Bishop Hubert Otto (1850–1938), Beijing, Jul 28, 1899, letter in Dutch. Reporting his attaché appointment and salary. Cited de Ridder (2000): 124, ft. 61.
  - 45 For this itinerary and other information on Paul Spilingaerd, I have relied on de Ridder (2000), which cites the original texts of letters in Dutch and French. I also made use of the reportage and other sources gathered in Spae (1986). For a list of mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century travelogues and research reports on Gansu, see also Horlemann (2015).
  - 46 See Spae (1986), Ch. 11: 127–28, citing Frochisse (1937): 228.
  - 47 A-CICM P.I.a.1.2.5.1.3.3, Rev. Ivo Lauwaert to the Superior-general, Adolf Van Hecke (1855–1931), Xixiang, May 29, 1900. Reporting that Colonel Fivé's party left Xixiang 西鄉 (Wuwei county, Liangzhou prefecture 涼州府武威縣) with Spilingaerd, travelling to northern Gansu. Cited de Ridder (2000): 126, ft. 64.
  - 48 Spae (1986), Ch. 11: 128, on the way back to Lanzhou, Spilingaerd and Colonel Fivé first stop to assist the defense of the missionary at Ganzhou prefecture 甘州府.
  - 49 Ivo Lauwaert's "Gnan si tcheou" (Anxi zhou) appears a variant of the more common rendition "Ngan si tcheou," referring to Turfan in Eastern Turkestan. Some examples of this placename are as follows: Hedin (1917), vol. 7: 151, discussing Klaproth's 1836 map of the mountain ranges around Karakorum. Stein (1920): 332, his second expedition in Autumn 1907 took him through the Gobi by the road leading through the desert, "from the oasis of Ngan-si to Hami," which served as a main road to Gansu. According to Rolf A. Stein (1983: 215–16), Yulin was a military post between Ngan-si (Turfan) and Yen-ki (Karasar) in the eighth century.
  - 50 A-CICM-ROMA, F.III.a.4.1.4.2.1, Rev. Ivo Lauwaert to the superior-general, Adolf Van Hecke, Xixiang, August 3, 1900, letter in French; my translation. Cited de Ridder (2000): 126–27, ft. 67.
  - 51 A-CICM, P.I.a.1.2.5.2.9.1, Paul Spilingaerd to Jerome Van Aertselaer, Ourga, April 26, 1901, letter in Dutch. Cited de Ridder (2000): 127, ft. 69. The Scheut fathers felt Gansu was administered by an "excellent governor" who "had great respect for the Europeans and even for the Christians," and as a result the area experienced less anti-missionary violence than other


parts of the country, see De Ridder (2000): 128–30. This likely refers to Governor Rao Yingqi.

- 52 Interview with *Le Patriote*, January 28, 1906, quoted Spaë (1986): 129–30. Spingaerd describes how “the Governor” acted formal and cold and different from usual. Spingaerd reminded him that their group, being ambassadors for the Belgian King, “could not ignore murderous acts committed against them,” and of his own status as an imperial mandarin.
- 53 A-CICM, P.I.a.1.2.5.2.9.1, Paul Spingaerd to Jerome Van Aertselaer, Ourga, April 26, 1901, letter in Dutch. Cited de Ridder (2000): 126, ft. 72. See also Steenackers (1907), in a tribute written shortly after Paul’s death, that Catherine was protected by “the Viceroy’s wife.” The A-CICM typewritten copy of the tribute is available in Vansacker (1995): Issue 37, Z.II.b.1.4.1.
- 54 Multiple letters written by Rev. Ivo Lauwaert mention the surname Wei, thus the “new governor Wei” that Spingaerd met with was viceroy Wei Guangdao.
- 55 A-CICM F.III.a.4.1.4.2.1, Ivo Lauwaert to the superior-general, Xixiang, September 8, 1900. Reporting that, on September 7, Spingaerd and his son Remy escorted Colonel Fivé, Henrard, and Ledent to Dajing 大靖 in order to continue to Urga.
- 56 A-CICM F.III.a.4.1.4.2.1, Ivo Lauwaert to the superior-general, Xixiang, February 20, 1901. Cited de Ridder (2000): 130, ft. 77. Reporting Spingaerd’s safe arrival at Urga on November 12, 1900.
- 57 Steenackers (1907), *ibid*.
- 58 See Serruys (1976), for a settlement letter in Mongolian, dated December 21, 1902, addressed to Spingaerd in Köke qota (Hohhot, Inner Mongolia), for his approval and promulgation. By March 24, 1903, Spingaerd was in Ningxia (part of Gansu in the Qing dynasty), see de Ridder (2000): 133 and ft. 91.
- 59 According to Steenackers (1907), Spingaerd agrees to return to Europe because he learned that English agents in Lanzhou were pressing the Governor-General with offers in return for Gansu’s mineral and other resources. He travels to Belgium to hire experts such as an “an engineer to examine the possibility for oil wells, a man capable of setting up and running a textile factory, a chemist for mineral analysis, etc.”
- 60 Megowan Spingaerd (2019): 193, the newspaper *Le Soir* announces Spingaerd’s arrival in Antwerp. On May 30, 1906, he boards a steamer back to China together with engineers.
- 61 Several members of the Aisin Gioro imperial clan held anti-foreigner sentiment and were supporters of the Boxers, including Zaiyi 載漪, whose son was heir-apparent, and his younger brother Zailan. They were grandsons of Daoguang emperor 道光 (r. 1820–1850) and cousins to Guangxu 光緒 (r. 1875–1908). After the uprising failed, foreign powers demanded their execution but were instead banished for life. A biography is available in Hummel (1943), vol. 1: 393. Also see Zhou Xuan (1994), who is critical of Zailan’s treatment by Xinjiang’s governors as more like an honored guest than prisoner in exile, and who was afforded servants, feasting, and other entertainment.
- 62 Cited Rong (1997, trans. 1999): 250, ft. 8.
- 63 Translation by Justin Jacobs of a letter in Chinese from Prince Zailan to Paul Pelliot, September 7, 1908, Box 79, *Notes et manuscrits de Paul Pelliot*. Pel. Mi. Musée national des Arts asiatiques (Guimet). Paris, France.
- 64 The highest ranking official at Urumqi would have been the governor (*xunfu* 巡撫), namely Rao Yingqi beginning in 1895. Governor Rao was subordinate to then Shaanxi-Gansu governor-general (*zongdu* 總督), Tao Mo.
- 65 Rao (2009), vol. 24: 176. Telegram dated 1895/12/03 sent via China Telegraph Bureau 中國電報局 49. An enormous archive of Rao Yingqi’s official documents—including memorials, memos, and telegrams—were gifted by Rao Fenghuang’s second daughter Rao Yusu 饒毓蘇 and spouse Prof. Lin Yaohua 林耀華 to the Zhongyang minzu daxue tushuguan 中央民族大學圖書館 (Minzu University of China Library), see Zhongyang Minzu daxue tushuguan (2009, June 5). With thanks to my research assistant, Wang Yuan, 2022 Frances Blakemore and Griffith Way Intern at Seattle Art Museum and current Ph.D. candidate at the University of Washington, who requisitioned many volumes from C.V. Starr East Asian Library at the University of California, Berkeley. Once digitized, this invaluable resource will no doubt reveal further insights.
- 66 Madam Wang’s epitaph is published by Rao Youwu 饒有武 (2014, July 20) in an online blog of the Rao clan genealogy. Also see Yao Jiadi 姚家棣 (2014, July 22).

## COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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