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An Evaluation of Robert van Gulik's The Gibbon in China and its Place in Modern Sinological Discourse

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The Gibbon in China: An Essay in Chinese Animal Lore (长臂猿考) is the first Western monograph that studies ancient Chinese gibbon culture systematically.1 It is also Robert van Gulik's last sinological treatise. Robert van Gulik (Gao Luopei 高羅佩) is greatly interested in Chinese culture. His detective novels, the Judge Dee series, are especially famous in China. His research on ancient Chinese sexual life, philosophy, lute, inkstone, painting and calligraphy are in-depth and insightful. But his research on Chinese gibbon culture has not got enough attention in academia. Only a few scholars pay attention to this book so discussion about it is rare in Western academia.

It is a challenge to give a brief overview of Robert van Gulik's (hereafter RvG) records because he is an extraordinarily multi-talented Dutch sinologist. His career combines outstanding achievements in three areas, "[a]ny-one of which would have sufficed to distinguish an ordinary person: a diplomat who served on important posts as a Netherlands envoy; a sinologue scholar, one with extraordinarily wide-ranging interests and knowledge; and an author-artist, creator of the immensely popular Judge Dee novels and the illustrations for them."2

1This paper was presented at the year 2013 meeting of the SEC/AAS conference, sponsored by the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, in Wilmington, North Carolina, USA. Jan 20, 2013.

2James Cahill, “Judge Dee and the Vanishing Ming Erotic Colour Prints”, Orientations November 2003, Volume 34, Number 9, p.40. Van Gulik based his material on the 18th century book titled Cases of Judge Dee (Di Gong An 狄公案). The Judge Dee character goes back to the historical figure Di Renjie (狄仁杰, Dí Rénjié) (c. 630–c. 700), magistrate and statesman of the Tang court. More on Judge Dee detective stories: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judge_Dee_stories

In The Gibbon in China (hereafter TGIC), RvG starts his account from the earliest traditions of Chinese culture. Traditional Chinese culture in this sense means both the ancient and the classical cultures from the Shang to the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1912. An institution important to the continuation of high cultural standards was the examination system (keju 科舉).The abolition of this system was effectuated in 1905 (Franke 1972).

Throughout his life, RvG had as his personal goal participation in the classical Chinese traditions. That is why he explores them in extenso. In traditional Chinese culture, the gibbon is considered the gentleman in the animal kingdom. Its image is similar to traditional Chinese scholar-officials (shidaifu 士大夫). These scholar-officials were civil servants appointed by the emperor of China to perform day-to-day governance from the Han Dynasty to the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1912, China's last imperial dynasty. These officials mostly came from the well-educated men known as scholar-gentry (shi 士). These men had earned academic degrees by passing the rigorous imperial examinations and were trained in both calligraphy and the Confucian texts.

Since only a small fraction of them could become court officials, the

majority of the scholar-gentry stayed in local villages or cities as social leaders. The scholar-gentry carried out social welfare measures, taught in private schools, helped decide minor legal disputes, supervised community projects, maintained local law and order, conducted Confucian ceremonies, assisted in the government's collection of taxes, and preached Confucian moral teachings. As a class, these scholars represented morality and virtue. Although they received no official salary and were not government officials, their contributions and cooperation were much needed by the district magistrate in governing local areas and receiving contributions from the imperial dynasty (Weber 1951 and Chan 2000).

RvG takes the position, after his analyses of the classical books and paintings on the gibbon, that the gibbon is depicted as taking a moral leadership position, metaphorically comparable to that of the recluse (yinshì 隱士), among the monkey clans and other animals in its forest canopy habitat in the remote mountainous areas. The gibbon is a lesser ape while monkeys are lower on the hierarchical ladder of primates; hence, gibbons (yuan 猿) are not monkeys (hou 猴) (TGIC 33). RvG chooses the gibbon because the animal has been an example of the shidaifu expressed throughout Chinese history in both art and literature. The gibbon also caters to the aesthetic taste of the Chinese scholarofficial with Taoist beliefs; thus, the gibbon represents a kind of simplified society that he highly values. During the many years of RvG's professional life he is interested in and gains access to books, paintings,

artifacts as well as the real animal (in and around his home).

Furthermore, he joins the elite class that shares these ideas and actual pleasures with him. Among the scholar gentry it was not customary to criticize openly the political system of the moment; however, by setting the good example of the gibbon, RvG takes the opportunity to give his opinion of a better society in just the same way other literati did in the Chinese tradition that he idolizes.

TGIC is the first Western monograph that studies the ancient Chinese gibbon culture cross-disciplinarily by researching literature, history, zoology and art. He cites the literature from the Shang, Zhou and Ming dynasties comprising three thousand years of Chinese poetry, essays, and historical notes on the gibbon. He focuses on the gibbon's status in the hearts of the Chinese literati and discusses the relationship between the gibbon and humanity. Thus, his approach is both original and pioneering.

A distinctive vision on a broader Chinese gibbon culture

In order to give a detailed account of the changing of the cultural image of the gibbon, RvG divides the history of ancient Chinese gibbon culture into three periods.

First period: early recorded history to the Han Dynasty (1500-202 BCE)

In the beginning of this period, the imagery of the gibbon is vague and mixed with that of monkeys, orangutans and other primates (TGIC 18-43). People in the Shang Dynasty had no precise understanding of the gibbon. All they knew was a generalized image of a monkey. The big gibbon (kui 夔) was respected as one of the earliest ancestors and totems by the people in the Shang Dynasty. RvG differentiates between and analyses the inscriptions on bronze objects, oracle bones and tortoise

shells of the Shang Dynasty and archaic words of the Zhou Dynasty (18-23 and 20-21, respectively). He performs textual research on five primates in the book Erya 爾雅 (Coblin 1993), the first dictionary in ancient China (TGIC 32), such as xingxing 猩猩, feifei 狒狒, rouyuan 猱蝯 apes like the orangutan, baboon, and gibbon, on the basis of which he then claims the gibbon's existence in ancient China. The problem is that our ancestors did not have a clear idea of the differences obtaining between gibbons and other primates. He cites verses from the Book of Odes (Shijing3 詩經), Songs of the South (Chuci4 楚辭), and Classic of the

3The Book of Odes (Shijing 詩經) is the first collection of Chinese poems. It is the

Mountains and Waters (Shanhaijing5 山海經). The Shijing and Chuci are considered to be important sources of Chinese literature. The great poet Qu Yuan 屈原 (339 - 278 BCE) is the founder and representative writer of Chuci. Shanhaijing is the first fantasy book that records intensively the mythic and primitive thinking of historic China (Birrell 2000 and TGIC 26). The book chapter "South Mountain Jing" ("Nanshanjing" 南山經) of the Shanhaijing says that, "[t]here is a mountain named Tang-ting three hundred miles eastward. There are many Yan trees and white gibbons in the mountain". In the Qu Yuan poem "Mountain Ghost of Nine Songs" ("Shangui jiuge" 九歌山鬼) he mentions the gibbon, chirping at night. This is the earliest description of the gibbon's call and also the beginning of the literary theme "the gibbon's call is sad". In fact, we may conclude that RvG's opinion that the gibbon existed in early China and that the idea that was a subject of admiration is correct.

Second period: From the Han Dynasty to the end of the Tang (202

BCE -907 CE)

In this period RvG postulates that the gibbon's image is poeticized, mystified and gentlemanized. RvG cites and quotes from the work of many poets in order to underline his contention that the gibbon is a figure that frequently appears on the scene. The gibbon is an eminently suitable theme for romantic verse as the animal is the bearer of sentiments, the sound of nature in its most prominent way. Nowadays we might call this an example of eco-poetics as they express environmental consciousness.

RvG is also concerned about the real and material world in his explanations; however, he is also interested in the metaphysical aspects of the gibbon in literature. He searches various religious texts including both folk and natural religion. The vast amount of literature is proof of the interest in Chinese culture in the creation of good and bad powers. To the Chinese, it is the moon, mountains, water and also the gibbon that appear in mystical roles. Both the position of man in the Universe and the identification of the Self are vital aspects of the conceptualization of nature in religion.

In the realm of religion in China three main movements can be distinguished briefly: the native Chinese tradition, Daoism, and, after source of Chinese literature. (Allen 1996).

4Songs of the South (Chuci 楚辭) is an anthology of Chinese poetry by Qu Yuan 屈原 (340–278 BCE), a great poet in the Warring States Period (475-221BCE) (Hawkes, 1959).

5Classic of the Mountains and Seas (Shanhai jing 山海經) is the earliest Chinese geography book containing myths and legends.

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the Qin Dynasty (221–206 BCE), Buddhism. In the course of many centuries the meditative and socially oriented Daodejing 道德經 was combined with both the ecstatic and individualistic mysticism of the Zhuangzi 莊子 (369-286 BCE), with its beliefs and practices for longevity, and Buddhist insight on meditation, mind analysis, and doctrines of karma and reincarnation. Later developments in Chinese religion and philosophy include Inner Alchemy, Ch'an Buddhism, and Neo-Confucianism (Underhill 2012 and Kohn 1991).

In biological classification the gibbon is placed at the top level of neuro-social complexity categorized in the group of apes together with the human species. RvG was aware of Darwin's ideas in this respect. In the gibbon RvG sees human-like qualities in the best possible way, i.e. the qualities of the gentleman (see above my remarks on shidaifu) that Confucius or Kong Fuzi 孔夫子 is portrayed as embodying in the Analects (Lunyu 論語) thereby becoming an integral part of Chinese culture.

RvG in this way presents several famous poets like Tao Qian 陶潛 6, also called Tao Yuan-ming 陶淵明 (365-427 BCE), who writes:

Forlornly I dwell in the lonely mountains,
where the calls of the gibbons are casual but sad.
郁郁荒山里,猿聲閑且哀. (TGIC 52, Hinton 1993, Tao Chien 1984)

Another famous poet he cites is Bao Zhao 鮑照 (ca. 415-466 CE). Bao Zhao7 writes：

The chickens cackle down by the clear stream,
the gibbon call high up in the white clouds.
鷄鳴清澗中，猿嘯白雲裏 。(TGIC p52)

The belief that the gibbon's call is sad appears in many poems and becomes a conventional literary motif that has existed in Chinese culture for more than two thousand years.

Many poets have contributed to the creation of the poetical gibbon, 6Tao Qian 陶潜 (365–427 BCE), the famous poet of the Eastern Jin dynasty (317–420 CE).

7Bao Zhao 鲍照 is the famous litterateur of the Southern Dynasty. He wrote Fu (賦) poems, a form of Chinese rhymed prose.

the role of the gibbon as an iconic figure in poetry. As a form of anthropomorphism, the poetical gibbon is the carrier of human sentiments like anxiety or excitement in situations of danger, e.g. travelling in a small boat in the fast flowing current between high rocks, the worries about the shortness of life, homesickness and longing for a lost lover or faraway friends. In short, the gibbon stands in for the troubles of life in general.

The animal also reflects the Daoist adoration of nature as well as the sound of nature itself. In the many poems RvG cites, it can be read that waterfalls, streams and mountains have magical and supernatural powers of their own. The natural phases of the climate (e.g. rain, wind and sun) and musical instruments such as the flute or the 'old' seven stringed 'lute' (guqin 古琴) are also used to convey emotional power, but RvG suggests that the gibbon adds its own voice or speaks for nature in the poetic tradition.

The poets also use the gibbon to emphasize nature's beauty. This animal is the heart of nature, the vital presence that brings nature to life.

The Gibbon can also be understood as playing the role of a soul mate to the human being who is often depicted roaming around often without a definite purpose. While the gibbon finds his home in the forest canopy, man often seems homeless, in a state of war with his own kind and nature.

It was especially Li Bai 李白 (701–62)8 who contributed much to the development of the poetical gibbon by pouring a plethora of emotions and spiritual insights about life into his poems. He described his excitement when he took a boat trip:

In the morning I left the rainbow clouds of Baidi,
In one day I covered one thousand miles to Jiangling.
Before the gibbons on both riverbanks had ceased calling,
My small boat had already passed ten thousand mountain peaks.9

下江陵
朝辭白帝彩雲間，千里江陵一日還。
兩岸猿聲啼不住，輕舟已過萬重山。(TGIC 60)

In another poem, he is reminded by the gibbon's voice that his life has

8Li Bai 李白 (701–62), the greatest poet of Tang dynasty (618–907).

9Li Bai, "Early Departure form Baidi Town" ("Zhao fa Baidi cheng" 朝發白帝城), also translated as "Leaving the White Emperor Town at Dawn." In: Xu Yuanzhong, "Bilingual Edition 300 Tang Poems", Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2000 p. 191.

but a short span.

The gibbon's call turns my hair white, like long or short silk.10

猿聲催白髮，長短盡成絲. (TGIC 61)

For the poet, hearing the gibbon's call evokes memories and love of his

hometown:

The travelers can't live in Qiu Pu

because the gibbon's call will break their heart.

君莫向秋浦，猿聲碎客心. (TGIC p61)11

The impermanence of life sounds in this memento mori:

A lonely gibbon is crying on a tomb in the moonlight.

孤猿坐啼墳上月. (TGIC p60)12

In the poem "Looking for a monk and not finding him" Li Bai

accentuates the imagery of the poet in a lonely place, a place in which

everything seems to be in vain. Suddenly the mist disappears, rain looks

like flowers musically falling from the sky. Then the gibbon calls. He

becomes aware of and filled with the beauty of nature.

But then turning back several times,

Seeing how the mist on the hills was flying, and then

A light rain fell as if it

were flowers falling from the

sky, making a music of its own;

Away in the distance

came the cry of a gibbon, and

for me the cares of the world

slipped away, and I was filled

10Li Bai, the fourth song of "Songs of Autumn Bank" ("Qiupu ge" 秋浦歌),

(TGIC p60).

11Li Bai, the tenth song of "Songs of Autumn Bank," idem.

12Li Bai, "Sad Song" ("Beige xing" 悲歌行).

with the beauty around me.

尋山僧不遇作

……

香雲偏山起，花雨從天來。

已有空樂好，况聞青猿哀。

了然絶世事，此地方悠哉。13 (Sun Yu, 1982)

RvG thinks that Li Bai's poems on the gibbon describe the spiritual, surreal and aloof gibbon, so these poems adequately represent the ancient Chinese gibbon literature (Versano, 1999).

RvG notes that in the late Tang Dynasty, there was an emergence of secular and multicultural trends of depicting gibbon imagery. The secular trend of the Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE) added a new element in the Chinese gibbon culture. For example, prior to the Tang, many remarks were made about 'strange things' like the 'fei fei' an ape-like creature that lived in the mountains and looked like a monster or goblin (TGIC 27-29). These creatures do not exist in modern zoology, but for some writers and poets of those days they were an enormous inspiration. After these popular religious and mystical influences on the development of gibbon imagery faded, a more worldly approach developed. This more sophisticated approach to gibbon imagery emerged with multicultural trends in literature impacted by international trade relationships that created an affluent society in which science and the arts could prosper. Now not only was the nice and romantic side of the gibbon emphasized but also negative aspects appeared such as aggressiveness, alcoholism, and/or desires of the flesh. Some examples of this development from Tang Legends such as A fisherman in River Chu (Chu jiang yu zhe 楚江漁者), Ouyang He (Ouyang He 歐陽紇), Sun Ke (Sun Ke 孫恪), Chen Yen (Chen Yan 陳岩) (TGIC

67)14 and history books such as The Annals of Wu and Yue (Wu Yue chunqiu 吳越春秋)15 all mention that the gibbon could change into an old wise man or a beautiful woman. Those gibbons, however, also indulge in alcohol, beauty and/or worldly love. They are the

13http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/looking-for-a-monk-and-not-finding-him/

14Tang Legend, the fictions in Tang Dynasty, e.g. A fisherman in River Chu (Chu jiang yuzhe 楚江漁者), Ou Yang-he (歐陽紇), Sun Ke (孫恪), Chen Yen (陳岩) are all Tang Legends that focus on the gibbon story.

15The Annals of Wu and Yue (Wu Yue chunqiu 吳越春秋) is a history book which records the history of Wu and Yue during Spring and Autumn Period (770–476 BCE). The author is Zhao Ye 趙曄, a famous scholar in the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220 CE). http://ctext.org/wu-yue-chun-qiu

embodiment of secular people. The secularization of the gibbon is the reflection of the blossoming of bourgeois literature during the middle and late T'ang dynasty. There are several poetical essays devoted to the gibbon, such as "Poem of the Black Gibbon" ("Xuanyuan fu" 玄猿賦) by Wu Yun 吳筠 (died 778 CE) (Yip 1997) (TGIC 54) and "Poem of the White Gibbon" ("Baiyuan fu" 白猿賦) by Li Deyu 李德裕 (787 – 850 CE) (TGIC 56).

The reclusive poet Wu Yun describes the gibbon as an example for man of how one should live emancipated from all worldly cares (TGIC 54). Li De-yu points out the difference between the aloof gibbon and the quarrelsome and volatile macaque (TGIC 56). The latter refer to Li Deyu's own enemies who brought about his downfall at court.

RvG speculates that those ancient scholar-officials project their ideal

personalities onto the gibbon (TGIC 27, 69, 73). He explains that 'strange animals' such as the 'fei fei' do not fit in the modern Tang period religious and philosophical teachings that included rejection of the superstitious and mystical elements of both Daoism and Buddhism. The accentuation of the morality of the scholar-gentry is not only projected onto society but also on nature and natural processes. In addition, the negative aspects of imagined animal life (aggressiveness, alcoholism, or desires of the flesh) are discarded as horrid character traits. In summary, this is an effect of the Tang revival of old cultural values viz. neo-Confucianism (Song Ming Lixue 宋明理学) sometimes shortened to science (Lixue 理學).

Here also psychology comes into play: the gibbon became an example of natural and thereby good qualities. This was confirmed by RvG after his observation of his own pet animals (TGIC 73). Today, however, the gibbon is often presented as a prototype of bad or dark aspects of human behavior. The behavior of some gibbons is strange: killing other animals and human beings, eating their meat, devilish action such as marrying a man after changing into a woman, and changes from young into old specimens, sudden disappearances into the woods to name a few.

The 20th century psychoanalyst with strong cultural-anthropologic interests, Erich Fromm (1900 – 1980), following in Sigmund Freud's footsteps, clarified the interaction of human thinking in prejudices and attribution on freedom, religion and zoomorphic myths (Fromm, 1950). The connection between RvG and Fromm is the focus on the dark elements about the gibbon that RvG alludes to in the text of TGIC. Here the link with the subconscious or 'ES' (German technical term for the

deeper layers of the human mind) can be drawn. Fromm explains aboriginal art and concepts about animals with interpretations in human terms about good, social, empathetic or bad and aggressive. In

his own observations on gibbons, RvG focused on their social and sexual behavior and made comparisons with human beings. Films like King Kong (1933) are still prominent examples of the dark depths of our subconscious.

Third period: From the Song to the Ming Dynasty (960-1644 CE)

From the Song to the Ming dynasty, as the scope of human activities expand, the gibbon gradually moved to the remote mountain forests. RvG focuses on the gibbon's image in works of art (TGIC 76-96). RvG thinks there were two factors that improved the art of painting in the Song Dynasty. One is the development of "free sketch painting," the other is the popularity of Zen (Chan 禅) painting which made the artists concentrate much more on the communication with the nature. In TGIC RvG takes ample space to introduce these two art forms, sketch painting and Zen painting. These two forms and their products are relevant for this discourse, on the one hand due to the historical overview on movements or schools in painting and on the other hand due as being inextricably linked in Chinese culture by their underlying principles. When a drawing or painting with gibbons in our context is interpreted, the message of the artist in either school is an underlying truth.

While inheriting the literary traditions of former generations, the Chinese artists enrich and develop the image of the gibbon in paintings.

RvG mentions many famous artists such as a. Yi Yuanji 易元吉 (ca. 1000–ca. 1064) (Russell & Cohn, 2012) (TGIC p79) and b. Mu Xi 牧溪 (born around 1200) (Wey, 1974) (TGIC p87).

Yi Yuanji is a famous traditional realistic painter in the Period of Emperors Enzong and Yingzong. The 11th-century critic Guo Ruoxu 郭若虛 (active around 1070) wrote in his book "An Overview of Painting" (Tuhua jianwen zhi 圖畫見聞志) about Yi's career: [... His painting was excellent: flowers and birds, bees and cicadas he rendered life-like with subtle detail. At first he specialized in flowers and fruits, but after he had seen such paintings by Zhao Chang 趙昌, he admitted their superiority with a sigh, and then resolved he would acquire fame by painting subjects not yet tried by the artists of old; thus, he began to paint roebucks and gibbons.…] RvG translated this book in English, 1967 and from this information we can conclude that Yi was trained in the old school techniques and later in his career painted gibbons too. He liked to observe the wild gibbons and often stayed with the gibbons, deer and other animals in the wild. So his paintings are so vivid that they look like photographs.

Mu Xi was called the monk painter. Around 1215 he lived in a

Chan Buddhist temple at the shore of West Lake (Xihu 西湖), near present day Hangzhou,. His topics included landscapes, flowers, and portraits. His Guanyin 觀音 and The Six Persimmons are his most famous works. Mu Xi practiced the ‘ink and wash’ (“moran” 墨染) technique: a fast technique with a broad brush and very moist ink. In this way he expressed the Chan aesthetics and spirituality of simplicity and

reduction, calmness and directness (Loehr 1980 and Geissmann 2008).

Many scholars have ventured general comparisons of Eastern Art.

Gulick puts it this way:

Oriental artists are not interested in a photographic representation of an object but in interpreting its spirit, not form. Occidental art exalts personality, is anthropocentric and cosmo-centric. It sees man as an integral part of nature. The affinity between man and nature was what impressed Oriental artists rather than their contrast, as in the West. Nature in the west is man-made symmetry and superimposed forms with the physical world being an objective reality to be analyzed, used, mastered. To Orientals, on the contrary, it was a realm of beauty to be admired, as is, but also of mystery and illusion to be pictured by poets, explained by mythmakers, and mollified by priestly incantations. This contrast between East and West had incalculable influence on their respective arts, as well as on their philosophies and religions. (Gulick 1963:253-255)

RvG made a comparison of Yi yuan-ji's realistic and Mu-xi's impressionistic styles. He claims that he himself prefers the latter because this style answers to the highest requirement of Chinese aesthetics, namely connotation (hanxu 含蓄) meaning that there is more inside than is expressed on the outside.

In accord with the historical context, i.e. the three episodes outlined above for literature together with the mainstream Chinese art forms, RvG collects and organizes the documentation related to both literature and image data and builds a logical, plentiful Chinese gibbon culture history. His research formulated in TGIC presents a clear outline of the gibbon imagery to Western and Asian audiences.

A unique contribution to the Chinese gibbon culture

In his monograph, RvG defines three main ideas of Chinese gibbon worship tradition. They are: a) the gibbon has a noble character; b) lives in groups with strong family ties; c) is good at gathering qi (氣, qi is a

kind of energy or the fundamental stuff of the universe); and, d) it lives as a recluse. These separate ideas will be expanded with more details as they are relevant for the overall understanding of RvG's research.

The high status of the gibbon was built in the early Zhou Dynasty. The Book of the Master Who Embraces Simplicity (Baopu zi 抱朴子), a Daoist book written by Ge Hong 葛洪 (284–c. 343)16, mentions that all junzi 君子 (gentlemen) in King Mu of Zhou's army changed into gibbons and cranes when he made 'the southern expedition'.17 The gibbon lives in the remote mountain forests, braving the wind, dew and snow. People can hear its call, but can rarely see it. So the gibbon is similar to the recluse. As a recluse, the status of the gibbon was further strengthened during the Wei, Jin, Northern and Southern Dynasties as well as the Sui, Tang Dynasties. Li Yin (李隱), a scholar in the Tang Dynasty, told the story of how a gibbon changed into a fisherman and fished on Chu Jiang in his mystery novel collection Records from the Xiao and Xiang Regions (Xiao Xiang Lu 瀟湘錄). In ancient China, a fisherman is often implied to be a reclusive wise man. In Li's story, the gibbon and the recluse become one. Wu Yun (吳筠), a famous scholar in the Tang Dynasty who went into seclusion after having failed the imperial examination and who subsequently became a Daoist, wrote the 'Poem of the Black Gibbon' and praised the black gibbon for having

longevity as the crane and the character of the gentleman. He claimed that if the human being could live as the gibbon, the world would return to the simple, honest, natural and harmonious golden age. The combination of the gibbon and crane often appeared in poems and paintings. Some ancient Chinese scholars like to raise the gibbon and crane to be their partners and thereby demonstrate their noble characters.

RvG thinks that the reason the gibbon becomes a symbol of a reclusive junzi is due to its unique character. The gibbon is kind, gentle, transcendent, tranquil and inactive. It lives a secluded life. These characters accord with the aesthetic taste of both Daoism and traditional Chinese scholars. The harmony between gibbon and nature, their special characteristics, are similar to the philosophical ideas of Laozi and Zhuangzi. Laozi 老子 (fl. 6th century BCE) is known as the author of the Daodejing, the classic text of the virtuous way (TGIC p23) and

16Ge Hong (葛洪 284–around 342), a Daoist and medical expert in the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317_420).

17Between 976 and 922 BCE, King Mu of Zhou (Zhou Muwang 周穆王) also called Ji Man 姬满 reigned as the fifth king of the Western Zhou dynasty (1046–771 BCE). The country had many enemies. King Mu commanded six armies and sent a punitive expedition to the Chu 楚 State which was a southern state. The king of Chu feared these armies with chariots, so that he surrendered to the state of Zhou.

Zhuangzi (fl. 4th century BCE) is credited with writing—in part or in whole—a work known by his name, the Zhuangzi (TGIC 23).

The gibbon lives in a setting with strong family ties. According to

modern zoology, around 98% to 99% of the gibbon's genes are identical to those of human beings. The gibbon family has human-like relations in so far as they are monogamous, hierarchical and they respect age and morality. There are many moving stories about gibbon families. In A New Account of Tales of the World (Shishuo xinyu 世說新語, an early literary sketch by Liu Yiqing 劉義慶 (403–44)18, a story is told about a female gibbon who died heartbrokenly because her son was raped by a human being. Another story in Rustic Words of a Man from Eastern Qi (Qidong yeyu 齊東野語) that was written by a scholar in the Song Dynasty, Zhou Mi 周密 (1232–98)19 described a baby gibbon cried and jumped to its death because his mother was killed.

Another reason that Chinese people respect the gibbon is because they think the gibbon is good at gathering qi. The gibbon has long arms which can be used to gather qi and this means longevity. Everyone hopes to have a life as long as that of the gibbon.

Gibbons are supposed to be similar to recluses as they live in remote mountain forests. References to recluses can be found in many historical records. These recluses preferred a life in the countryside with small crop farming, hunting or collecting medicinal herbs. They loved the beauty of nature and tried to combine these activities with teaching, reading and writing. For that goal the yinshi declined an official career. While Confucianism encourages the elitist intellectuals to participate actively in state management, some preferred the reclusive lifestyle and abhorred government employment. Two famous examples are Zong Bing (375–443), Wu Zhen 吳鎮 (1280–1354) and Shen Zhou 沈周 (1427–1509). Sometimes someone decided to retire after a political career. One such example is Tao Qian. In his work "The Return" ("Guiqulai ci" 歸

去來辭), he speaks with enthusiasm about returning to a life close-tonature after a long period of office work. One of his kind is Wen Zhengming 文徵明 (1470–1559).

Some recluses tried to combine both lifestyles. Wang Wei 王維 (699–759) a friend of Li Bai, together the top poets of the Tang Dynasty, was dissatisfied with his bureaucratic work, but needed the financial rewards. In his poetry this sentiment can be felt. For Chinese intellectuals, reclusion represented an alternative way of life and is often closely associated with Daoism. The freedom that comes with reclusion

18Liu Yiqin 劉義慶 (403–44), a famous litterateur in Liu Song dynasty who authored the book "A New Account of Tales of the World" (Shishuo xinyu 世說新語).

19Zhou Mi 周密 (1232–98), a litterateur in the Southern Song dynasty.

enabled many to major achievements in Chinese elite culture: literature, painting, music, calligraphy, philosophy, and academic studies. (Li Chi, 1962-63). Though RvG knew the life of a recluse, he was an intellectual who always sought compatibility with his political career.

As a Western sinologist with his own knowledge background and scientific spirit, RvG surveys the reliability of several traditional gibbon themes in Chinese literature and artistic works.

The first theme, "The gibbon's call is sad" ("Yuan xiao ai" 猿嘯哀) (TGIC 52), is one of the biggest themes of the literature on this topic. In the ancient poems and essays, the gibbon's call was often related to sadness and loneliness. As is evident in these quotes:

When the gibbons call thrice, tears wet one's dress (TGIC 46).

猿鳴三聲淚沾裳

And

Hearing the gibbon's call, inch by inch my entrails are torn.

(TGIC 53)

聞猿嘯而寸寸斷腸

No one knows exactly how far back this statement goes. RvG thinks it may originate from Qu yuan's poem "Mountain Ghost" ("Shangui" 山鬼); however, both Guo Maoqian 郭茂倩 (1041–99) , a scholar in the Song Dynasty and Qian Qichen 錢其琛 (1673–1769), a scholar in the Qing Dynasty, think this statement derives from Zhi Jian 智匠, a monk scholar in the Southern Dynasty. He wrote a musical monograph entitled Records of Old and New Music (Gujin yulu 古今樂錄) in which he mentions the folk song "Daughters" ("Nü'er zi" 女兒子) that describes the gibbon's sad call for the first time.

RvG corrects the opinion that the gibbon's call is in fact not sad. Sadness is of course a very subjective emotion and dependent on time and culture. Actually, the gibbons derive great pleasure and satisfaction from calling and it also forms part of their mating game.

The second theme emerges in the following passage: "The gibbon can come down to drink, a hundred arms forming a chain" (猿猱下飲, 百臂相聯) (TGIC p 43). RvG cites a story in Anthology of Tales from the

Taiping Era (Taiping guangji 太平廣記):20 "Wang Renyu 王仁裕 (880–956), who was a poet, soldier and musician (TGIC p64), was relieved of his duties in Hanzhong 汉中 and crossed over into the Sichuan province. When he and his retinue halted in front of a temple on Pochung mountain, on the bank of the Han river, a troop of gibbons let

themselves down, holding each other's hands and feet, to drink from the clear stream" (TGIC 66). It is said that Wang set an imprisoned gibbon free and the animal in the wild recognized his master after a long time. RvG points out that although gibbons do occasionally hang on each other in play, they do not deliberately form a chain in order to reach an object lying on the ground. The idea caught the fancy of Chinese writers, artists and artisans, as it suggests a group consciousness among the gibbons.

The third theme is suggested in the following: "The gibbon is better than the monkey , the former is clean, gentle and recluse, the latter is dirty, noisy, greedy and vulgar" ("Mei yuan su hou"美猿俗猴) (TGIC 58). RvG thought this idea was pragmatic. Ancient Chinese literati like Wu Yun ("Poem of the Black Gibbon") (TGIC 54-56), Li Deyu ("Poem of the White Gibbon) (TGIC 56-57), and Liu Zongyuan 柳完元 (773–819)21 ("Essay on the Hateful Monkey-breed" or "Zeng wangsun wen" 憎王孙文) (TGIC 54-56). Each compared the quarrelsome and volatile monkey with the aloof gibbon (TGIC 56). The lament is evidently directed against the people at court who caused their patron's downfall (TGIC 57). Wu Yün, Li Deyu and Liu Zongyuan contrasted the violent and vulgar monkey with the high-minded and well-behaved gibbon. So the monkey is described as greedy, cruel and undependable, and ugly in appearance" (TGIC 57).

The fourth theme is thus stated: "The arms of a gibbon are interconnected at the upper ends, and in this way the animal is able to lengthen one arm by pulling the other in) ("Yuan tongbi" 猿通臂). RvG cites a story written by Zhao Yi 趙翼 (1727–1814)22, a scholar in the Qing dynasty:

The magistrate of the district T'ier-pao sent me a black gibbon, which I had put on a leash attached to a pillar in my office. An office-attendant teased it, keeping at a distance of seven or eight feet. Suddenly the gibbon lengthened his right arm and grabbed the man's robe, nearly tearing it. At

20TIGC page 66.

21Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773–819), famous poet and scholar-official in Tang dynasty.

22Zhao Yi 趙翼 (1727–1814), the story is in his note The Miscellaneous Notes Sun-dried under the Roof (Yan pu za ji 簷曝杂记).

that time there was no arm on the gibbon's left shoulder. From this it may be concluded that the left arm had served to lengthen the right, and thus this was what is called a gibbon with interconnecting arms. (TGIC 73, 94)

This conception was popular in ancient China. Both famous novels, Water Margin23 and Journey to the West24, have a character named "The Interconnected-arm Gibbon" (Tongbi Yuan 通臂猿). In the former, Tongbi Yuan is the nickname of a hero in The Marshes of Mt. Liang; in the latter, a divine monkey has magical capabilities.

RvG thought it was a strange old fantasy. This false impression must have been caused by the truly incredible speed with which a gibbon reaches out with one arm while keeping the other close to its body. In present-day primatology an explanation of shoulder hyper flexibility is to be found in its unique anatomy [Ankel-Simons, 2007].25

The meaning of RvG's research regarding the Chinese gibbon

Above we have already introduced RvG's distinctive vision and unique contribution to Chinese gibbon culture. His vision reflects the idea of an

overview of all the fields the junzi is interested in: not only literary and artistic, including aesthetics, but also zoological and anthropological; he is not even afraid of mentioning the supernatural aspects attributed to the gibbon. His contribution to modern sinology is his tenacious endeavor to bring all the material on the subject together and apply his analytical ability. It is not only the categorization of books and drawings from the end of the second half of the 20th century in the backward China of those days that impresses the modern reader who is accustomed to electronic data collections and random digital expert opinions but also the sublime writing skills that open a totally new landscape with hidden treasures. The most important thing is not the conclusion he draws, but the methods he applies. Let us see how he performs his research on the Chinese gibbon material in more detail and consider the effects for future workers in the fields he elaborates.

23Water Margin (Shuihu zhuan 水滸傳) , written by Shi Nai'an 施耐庵 (active 1296–1371) in the end of Yuan dynasty and the beginning of Ming dynasty.

24Wu Cheng'en 吳承恩 (ca. 1500–ca. 1582) wrote the Journey to the West (Xiyou ji 西游記) in the Ming dynasty. Chinese Classics, Classic Novel. Trans. W.J.F. Jenner. 2003. Foreign Languages Press. http://www.chinapage.com/monkey/monkey.html

25 In primatology brachiation (from 'brachium', Latin for 'arm'), or arm swinging, is a form of arboreal locomotion in which primates swing from tree limb to tree limb using only their arms. During brachiation, the body is alternatively supported under each forelimb. This form of locomotion is used exclusively by the small gibbons and siamangs of southeast Asia.

From a macroscopic perspective, RvG's research on the gibbon

creates a model for other scholars' study of animal culture. Most Western scholars study the gibbon from the angle of zoology possibly in connection with environmental questions, whereas RvG's viewpoint is from the angle of cultural history. His research is based on the intertwining relationship of human being and gibbon and reveals the deep cultural factors of some phenomena about the gibbon. His way of doing research inspires many later scholars. Some examples include Roel Sterckx and his essay "The Animal and the Daemon in Early China" (Sterckx, 2002) and Robert Joe Cutter's "The Brush and the Spur: Chinese Culture and the Cockfight" (Cutter, 1989).

RvG's research on the gibbon supplies other investigators with both scientific and practical methods. One of RvG's ways is by citing ancient texts and images as the source of basic material from which to create evidence. RvG collects a range of data from poems, essays, novels, notes, and local annals. He gives the impression that he has read them all and in part translates them into English himself (for separate publications). In TGIC the transcription of many ancient Chinese texts can be found. Although there are a few mistakes in those quotations, his efforts (from seeking and selecting to combing out and typesetting) are inspirational. Thus, those messy raw materials become persuasive evidence in his book. RvG also uses a mass of images in his book, from the inscriptions on bones or tortoise shells of the Shang Dynasty to the gibbon paintings of the Song, Yuan and Ming dynasties. In total there are 58 pictures. The pictures in grayish tones are of a fair quality and fit for a first encounter for many of us to enhance discussion (at present, digital mega-pixel pictures allow the visitors of museum websites to explore them at an even deeper level). They are all, taken together, interesting

visual evidence for RvG's elaboration of the role of the gibbon in Chinese culture. The accompanying essay, partly type written and partly handwritten Chinese characters, is serious yet highly readable.

The other aspect is the raising of animals in order to obtain firsthand material. RvG raises four gibbons in captivity in order to observe their habits and lifestyle. This was then a fairly common practice in the style of the junzi. He also records the gibbons' call and attaches the disk to his book. He hopes that every reader can enjoy the gibbon's graceful call. Meanwhile, he creates a new social scientific research program that combines text, pictures and acoustical information, in order to motivate the reader's sense organs and elaborative faculty. Beyond a doubt, he is successful in this effort; although, nowadays researchers would leave this aspect to primatologists and zoological gardens.

RvG's impact on modern Sinological discourse about the gibbon

The following question can be posed: as a Western scholar, why was RvG so interested in the Chinese gibbon culture? We propose three primary reasons.

First, his consistent adoration of the Chinese culture and his dream to be a Chinese style scholar-official, a junzi. This kind of emotion can be found throughout his whole life. As we have mentioned above, the gibbon is the gentleman in the animal kingdom, its image is similar to the traditional Chinese scholar-official.

In TGIC, RvG illustrates the position of the gibbon in Chinese culture along with the exposition of an array of material during three

historical episodes he develops four ideas on gibbon worship and corrects wrong readings of four themes in 'gibbon-ology'. Here, there is enough evidential material to corroborate his proposition that gibbon research in its broadest sense is important and should be continued with enthusiasm. It is possible that RvG in his last publication before he died echoes an even more serious tone viz. a) concern for the vanishing world of the old style junzi and his traditional values; b) concern for the future of the gibbon in the virgin forests of Asia; c) care and concern for the proper conservation of fragile old paperwork of samples of calligraphy, books, etc.; d) concern for the situation of the world during his time in the midst of international conflicts; and, e) personally experienced end of life sentiments, as he had read many times, for instance, in the poems of Li Bai.

Second, his respect and fascination with Laozi, the philosophical concepts of Zhuangzi and Chinese eremitic culture. The essence of Daoism and Zhuangzi's philosophy is returning to nature and inaction expressed by the concept of "no action" ("wuwei" 無為), meaning 'Do nothing and everything will be done'. Because the character-traits of the gibbon accord with Daoist aesthetics thoughts and many Daoist recluses raised the gibbon to be their partner as pet animals, RvG established a link between gibbon and Daoist recluses. Tao Gu 陶穀 (circa 950) (Tao 2007), an official-scholar in the Song Dynasty, records an anecdote in his historic note Records of the Unworldly and the Strange (Qingyi lu 清異錄), the Daoist Li Daoyin 李道殷 who lived on the Hua Mountain kept a black gibbon whom he called Bitong 臂童. He had made for him a nest high up in an old pine tree, and there the gibbon slept; this he called 'Perch of lofty verdancy' (TGIC 73).

Last, but not least, the deep personal affection for the gibbons that he raised. Robert van Gulik's son Willem said the only time he saw his father weep was the time when Popo died (Popo was one of the gibbons he raised).

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In 1967 two important monographs were published on the gibbon. One is RvG's "The gibbon in China" (Gulik, 1967), the other is Desmond Morris' The Naked Ape (Morris, 1999). The former focuses on the gibbon's humanity and Chinese gibbon culture and the latter reveals the animal origin of mankind, in the line of Darwinian evolutionary thinking. Both of these publications are based on the intrinsic relationship between the gibbon, and the ape in general, and the human race. While they are both opposite and complementary to each other, they mutually testify their respective reasonability. They both pioneered and set a standard.

In conclusion, RvG and his work on the Chinese gibbon both deserve a place in modern Sinological discourse. To that end, a wider presentation of RvG's TGIC is fully deserved and further studies should be promoted. Literature and art and all the other fields disclosed in TGIC should be studied by both Chinese and western scholars in cooperation.

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