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Gibbon paintings in China, Japan, and Korea: Historical distribution, production rate and context

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Gibbons (the small apes of the family Hylobatidae) occupied in the past and still occupy today an important niche in Chinese – and for some time also in Japanese and Korean – cultures. Their importance can be assessed in the frequent depiction of gibbons in the figurative arts. This is the first study to quantify the production of gibbon paintings in various periods of these countries' history. A total of 818 gibbon paintings were surveyed. Results show that the earliest gibbon paintings are much older than suggested in some previous publications – both in China (pre-Song) and in Japan (pre-Momoyama). Moreover, because of the low sampling level of early Asian paintings, gibbon paintings as a genre in each of these countries may still have a much earlier origin than the date indicated by the earliest paintings found during this study. The genre originated in China and later spread to the neighbouring countries Japan and Korea, although artists had limited knowledge about the apes they painted because gibbons never naturally occurred in these countries. Chinese paintings depicted gibbons in a large number of functions and contexts, for instance as symbols of Daoist and Buddhist origin. In Japan, however, the genre was introduced by Zen (=Chan) monks, and the large majority of Japanese gibbon paintings depict the old Buddhist theme "Gibbons grasping for the reflection of the moon in the water". Stylistically, however, Chinese and Japanese gibbon paintings quickly drifted apart. The theme "Gibbons grasping for the reflection of the moon in the water" is not depicted in Korean paintings, but the small sample of Korean gibbon paintings found during this study precludes generalizations. The production rate of gibbon paintings/time in China underwent marked, previously undocumented fluctuations. During the period from 1525 to 1900, gibbon paintings were continuously, but not frequently, being produced in China. To judge by the number of preserved gibbon paintings from that time, the genre was apparently more popular in Japan than in China. The most dramatic increase in the production rate of gibbon paintings occurred in China during the 20th century. Whereas gibbon paintings as a genre had almost completely been abandoned in Japan during that time, China experienced a previously undocumented and apparently unprecedented increase both in the number of painters that produced gibbon paintings, as well as in the high number of gibbon paintings that were produced by some specialists among these painters. Possible reasons for these fluctuations are discussed. Finally, this study documents changes in style and context of gibbon paintings that occurred in various historical periods and discusses their possible causes.

Introduction

Gibbons are apes and thus are more closely related to humans than to monkeys (Geissmann, 2003; Groves, 2001). Although roughly 70% of all ape species are gibbons or small apes (family Hylobatidae), gibbons are, in most parts of the world, much less popular than their larger-bodied relatives, i.e. chimpanzees, gorillas and orang-utans. Yet, gibbons appear to have been the first apes to have had close relations with humans, and certainly have been the first to be made the object of literary and artistic compositions. Not only was the gibbon rich in symbolic meanings (like virtually every other subject traditionally favoured by Chinese painters and poets), but it also occupied a special niche in Chinese culture since more than 2,000 years, becoming "a symbol of the unworldly ideals of the poet and the philosopher, and of the mysterious link between man and nature", as Van Gulik observed in the preface of his seminal monograph on "The Gibbon in China" (Van Gulik, 1967).

Already during the Zhou dynasty (1027-221 BC), the gibbon emerged as a distinct presence when the Chinese singled out the gibbon as "the aristocrat among apes and monkeys" (Van Gulik, 1967, Preface). Daoists sought longevity and immortality by various disciplines, among the most important of which were breathing exercises, aimed at absorbing the largest amount of *qi* (a mystic fluidum sustaining the universe by its circulation) and making it circulate throughout the body. Excessively long limbs such as the gibbon's arms (or the crane's legs and neck) were thought to be conductive to this discipline. As a result, the gibbon was considered an "expert" in inhaling the *qi*, "thereby acquiring occult powers, including the ability to assume human shape, and to prolong their life to several hundred years" (Van Gulik, p. 38). In addition, gibbons (and cranes) are famous for their melodious calls and their graceful movements. Like the crane, gibbons were kept as pets

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by the literati (Silbergeld, 1987). In the Zhou dynasty gibbons still roamed over the virgin forests of central China.

From the Han dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) onward, references to gibbons in all literary forms are plentiful. The gibbon was characterized as more aloof and mystical in its solitary lifestyle, whereas the macaque was identified as being fickle, vulgar, and known to create a nuisance (Harper, 2001). The difference was even more accentuated in later periods. Liu Zongyuan's (= Liu Tsung-yüan, 773-819) "*Zeng wangsun wen*" ("Essay on the hateful monkey breed") portrays the macaque as the "bad monkey" in contrast to the gibbon as the "good monkey" (cited in, and translated by, Van Gulik, 1967, p. 58). During the Han, the gibbons had to abandon many parts of their natural range as large areas of land were brought under cultivation and many roads, bridges and canals were built. The gibbons still occurred in the mountain ranges along the border of Sichuan and Hubei where the Yangtze river flows east through a series of gorges. Their haunting calls in the gorges became the traditional symbol of melancholy of travellers far from home. As asserted by Van Gulik (1967), nearly every poet who wrote from the third to the seventh century referred to the graceful movements and the mournful calls of the gibbon, and references in Tang (AD 618-907) literature are even more numerous.

From the Song dynasty (AD 960-1279) onward, pictorial records of gibbons become available, and Chinese painters have pictured gibbons "in all shapes and attitudes" (Van Gulik, 1967). Yi Yuanji (a Hunan master active in the 1060s) may have been the first painter to specialise in painting gibbons, but he was certainly the first to achieve fame for his depictions of gibbons (Barnhart *et al.*, 1997). According to a eleventh-century biography by Guo Rexu (cited in Van Gulik, 1967, p. 79), Yi Yuanji "used to roam all over south Hubei and north Hunan, going more than a hundred miles into the Wanshou mountains; just to observe gibbons, deer and such like animals…". One of the most celebrated Chinese gibbon paintings and one of the most famous Zen paintings of all time in Japan is "*Mother Gibbon and Child*" (Barnhart *et al.*, 1997; Graham, 1991; Lovell, 1981) by the thirteenth-century artist Muqi, a native of Sichuan and a Chan (Zen) monk (Fig. 1). The painting is a component of Muqi's masterpieces "*Crane, White Robed Guanyin and Gibbon*": three paintings that can be most confidently ascribed to this artist (Cahill, 1960). Although it is unknown when they were united to form a triptych, it is known that they were bought between 1392 und 1408 by Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1358-1408) and that they are kept in the Daitoku-ji, the great Zen Buddhist temple in Kyoto since 1567 (Wey 1974, cited in Epprecht *et al.*, 2001, p. 128). In the triptych, the bodhisattva Guanyin (Japan: Kannon), the Goddess of Mercy, is flanked by a crane on the left, and by a gibbon mother embracing her infant on the right. These paintings became the source for long traditions of gibbon paintings (with or without cranes and Guanyin) in Japan (Klein and Wheelwright, 1984b; Epprecht *et al.*, 2001).

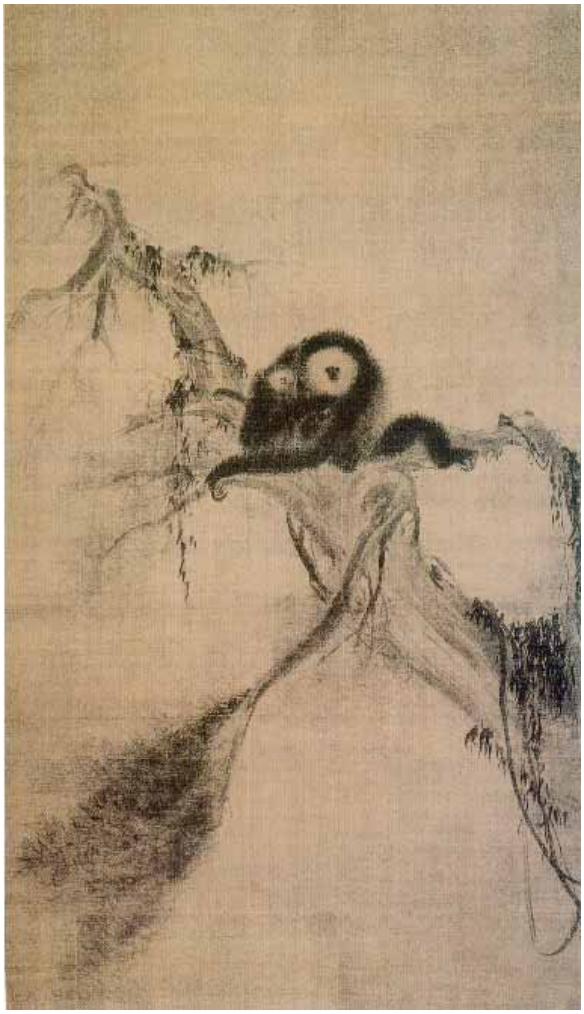

Fig. 1. *A gibbon with her baby on a pine branch*; right portion of the hanging scroll triptych *Crane, White Robed Guanyin, and Gibbon*. Muqi (c.1210- after 1269, Southern Song dynasty, China). Hanging scroll. Ink on silk. Dimensions: 173.9 x 99.4 cm. Daitoku-ji temple, Kyoto, Japan. Scan Number 0056671, courtesy of The John C. and Susan L. Huntington Archive, Ohio State University, College of the Arts. – *Gibbonmutter mit Kind auf einer Kiefer. Rechtes Bild eines Triptychons von Muqi (c.1210- nach 1269, Südliche Song-Dynastie, China).*

The gibbons' role in Chinese art and literature was so important, that the genre also spread to Japan and Korea, although neither country ever belonged to the gibbons' habitat. The history of gibbon paintings has only rarely been studied. The role of gibbons in Chinese (and Japanese) culture has been examined in considerable detail by Van Gulik (1967, pp. 97-99) and, to this day, every serious re-examination of this topic builds up on Van Gulik's monograph. The role of gibbons in Korean history was briefly summarised by Chon Chin-gi (2003). Tsumori (1997) surveyed Japanese paintings that depicted the popular subject known as "A monkey reaching for the moon". Although many gibbon paintings were doubtlessly

included in the artworks he surveyed, the author did not distinguish between gibbons and monkeys.

Unfortunately, Van Gulik's "survey ends with the beginning of the Qing dynasty, in AD 1644; "for after that date the gibbon became so rare in China that what is written about him is largely repetitious" (Van Gulik, 1967, Preface). Van Gulik's fascination with depictions of gibbons in Chinese art was also limited to antique paintings. The most recent painting discussed in his monograph was painted by the Hsuan-te Emperor (= Hsüan-tsung, 1399-1435). He described the painting as "ably executed" but "not a great work of art". Because the gibbons in this painting were so life-like he wondered whether the emperor had used live models from the palace park. Yet, he found the brushwork devoid of force and the shoulders of one of the gibbons too broad and anatomically incorrect. He ended his evaluation of this particular painting as follows: "As it is, this picture compares favourably to most paintings of gibbons done in the later half of the Ming, and during the subsequent Ch'ing [Qing] dynasty that ruled China till the Revolution in 1912" (Van Gulik, 1967, p. 96). This single sentence is also the only reference to Chinese gibbon paintings that were created after the reign of Hsuan-te. There is no reference to gibbon paintings that were created after 1912. To this day, there appears to be no study that tried to examine more recent gibbon paintings. Furthermore, no attempt has apparently been made to examine the temporal distribution and changes in the production rate of gibbon paintings on a quantitative basis. Such changes could point to changes in the cultural role and importance of gibbons and could also be helpful in establishing a chronology of a hitherto unexamined but crucial subject.

The goal of this study is to fill out these gaps. Quantitative data collected during this study document that the production of Chinese gibbon paintings continued into modern times. Moreover, the genre actually appeared to experience its greatest popularity during the 20th century, whereas the production of gibbon paintings in Japan (and possibly Korea) was practically abandoned during the same period.

Methods

For the quantitative analysis, only paintings, drawings or woodblock prints (including art on fans and album leaves) were evaluated quantitatively. Sculptured gibbons (e.g. jewellery, belt buckles, carved *netsuke* (toggles)), gibbons in reliefs (e.g. on figure bricks, tea kettles, *inro* (lacquerware medicine boxes), *tsuba* (metal sword guards)), and gibbon designs on porcelain were also surveyed but not included in the quantitative analysis. Information on gibbon paintings was collected from the pertinent literature, from internet sources, and by directly contacting the curators of museum collections of Asian art and auction houses.

Only paintings that could be dated at least approximately were included in this study. If the exact year of creation was unknown (as was the case for the majority of the paintings), I estimated it by calculating an average of the earliest and latest date of creation, for instance using the dates of birth and death of the artist, or the earliest and the last known dates of an artist's known artistic career.

Gibbons are usually identified as apes "*yuan*" [猿] in Chinese and Japanese language, as compared to monkeys or "*hou*" [猴]. Gibbons are gracile, long-limbed and tail-less apes. Wild gibbons live and travel in the tree crowns. They exhibit an acrobatic arm-swinging type of locomotion when moving below tree-branches (brachiation) and walk on two legs (bipedal locomotion) when moving upon branches or on the ground (the latter being rarely seen in wild gibbons).

Not all gibbon paintings correctly depict gibbon anatomy, fur coloration and behaviour. This may have several causes. While some artists (for instance many painters of the "flowers and birds" genre during the Chinese Song dynasty) apparently strived to maximise naturalism (Cahill, 1960, p. 73f; Hesemann, 2006, p. 144, 158), form-likeness was absolutely not an important quality of a painting for many other artists, who rather tried to capture the 'spirit' or 'essence' of an object (Cahill, 1960, p. 89f; Hesemann, 2006, p. 144). Furthermore, depending on the artist's familiarity with gibbons and maybe also the artist's qualities, some of the painted animals resemble macaques more than gibbons, whereas other painted gibbons exhibit characteristics not seen in any living animal species.

In this study, gibbon paintings that clearly depicted macaques were excluded even if the painting's title identified the animal as an ape ("*yuan*"). Painted primates that exhibited at least some attributes typical of gibbons were included.

Dimensions of paintings in the figure legends indicate first height, then width.

Survey Results

China

Figure 2 shows the temporal distribution of the 636 Chinese gibbon paintings found during this survey versus time.

The rarity of gibbon paintings before 1200 suggests poor preservation of painted art from these times. Much earlier paintings probably existed but were lost. This view is supported by the observation that gibbons were featured in Chinese art well before the 9th century. Some of them are briefly presented below.

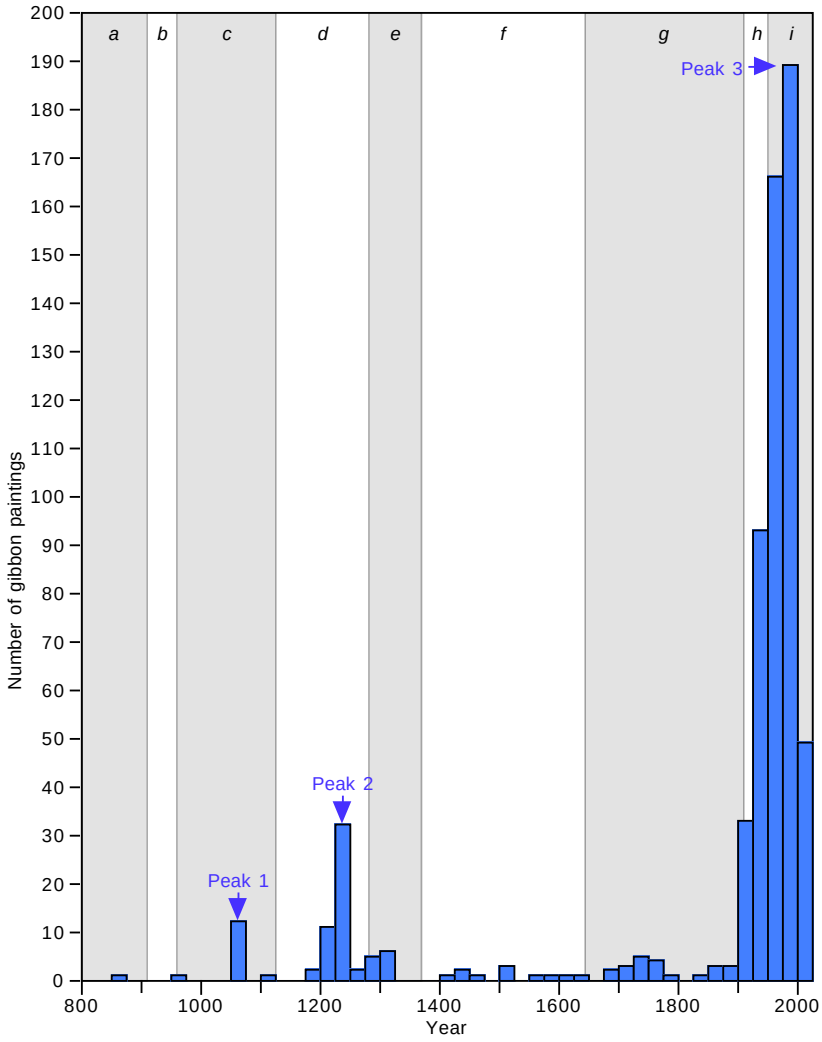

Fig. 2. Distribution of Chinese gibbon paintings versus time. Data: all known paintings until April 2008 (*n* = 636 paintings). Each blue bar represents the known gibbon paintings of a time period of 25 years. Alternating grey and white bars in the background represent the following periods and dynasties in Chinese chronology: (*a*) Tang: 618-907; (*b*) Five dynasties: 907-960; (*c*) Northern Song: 960-1126; (*d*) Southern Song: 1127-1279; (*e*) Yuan: 1279-1368; (*f*) Ming dynasty: 1368-1644; (*g*) Qing dynasty: 1644-1911; (*h*) Republic of China: 1911-1949; (*i*) The People's Republic of China: 1949-present. – *Geschichtliche Verbreitung von Gibbon-Gemälden in China (n = 636 Bilder). Jeder blaue Balken entspricht einem Zeitraum von 25 Jahren.*

Most of these early gibbon-shaped objects recorded during this study show a gibbon with its left arm stretched out forward and the other arm pointing in a different direction below the animal's body or behind it (e.g. Barrère, 2007; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 2007; Eskenazi, 1996, pp. 22-23; Liu, 1987, plate 299; Wang Tao, 2000, pp. 10-11; Zhongguo, 1980, vol. 2, plate 41, fig. 1). Gibbon-shaped objects of this type are known from the late Eastern Zhou period (4th-3rd century BC) and the Han dynasty (206 BC-AD 220). Two examples are shown in Figs. 3 and 4. Both wooden and metal versions of these gibbon objects exist. Several of them appear "to be wearing a trailing sash" (Eskenazi, 1996, p. 22) that looks as if the animal had a short tail (Fig. 3). The gibbons' hook-shaped hands were apparently designed to hold, or attach to, another object. Various functions have been proposed for these objects, including a garment-hook, a belt-hook or a belt-buckle, a ceiling fitting, or a piece of jewellery.

Fig. 3. Gilt and silvered bronze and turquoise garment-hook (*daigou*). Eastern Zhou dynasty, 4th-3rd century BC. Dimensions: length 13.5 cm. Source: Eskenazi (1996, pp. 22-23, no. 7). Courtesy of Eskenazi Ltd. – *Gewandhaken aus Bronze, vergoldet, versilbert und mit Türkis-Einlagen. Östliche Zhou-Dynastie, 4.-3. Jahrhundert v. Chr.*

Fig. 4. Bronze gibbon belt buckle. Han dynasty (206 BC - AD 220), Yunnan province. Dimensions: 10.3 x 0.33 x 0.17 cm. Unknown location. – *Gürtelschnalle aus Bronze. Han-Dynastie, 206 v. Chr. – 220 n. Chr*.

A different type of gibbon-shaped object is shown in Fig. 5. This bronze fitting, possibly one of a pair from which a hanging lamp was suspended, is cast as a gibbon with upstretched arms, inlaid all over in silver (Eskenazi, 2000, pp. 38). A gilded bronze gibbon of almost identical shape and size as the object described above dates from the Tang Dynasty (AD 618-907) (china-artweb.com, 2008).

A relief brick found in Xin'nongxiang (Xindu, Province Sichuan) and dating from the Eastern Han dynasty (AD 25-220) depicts an erotic scene observed by two gibbons hanging from a tree branch (Göpper, 1996, p. 412). This brick is reproduced in Fig. 6. According to Chen Lie (1996, pp. 411-413), the scene represents a springtime fertility rite that can be traced back to pre-Qing times (i.e. before 221 BC) and that is known as "worship of the Gaomei divinity". The whole scene, including the gibbons and

Fig. 5. Bronze and silver monkey fitting. Late Eastern Zhou period, 4th-3rd century BC. Dimensions: length 18.2 cm. Source: Eskenazi (2000, pp. 38-41, no. 5). Courtesy of Eskenazi Ltd.– *Halterung aus Bronze und Silber, Östliche Zhou-Dynastie, 4.-3. Jahrhundert v. Chr*.

Fig. 6. Figure brick depicting an erotic scene (*sangletu*) from a tile grave of the Eastern Han period (AD 25-220) from Xinnongxiang, Xindu county, Sichuan province. Ceramic, traces of reddish and black painting. Excavated in 1979. Dimensions: 29 x 50 cm. Collection of Xindu County Bureau of Cultural Antiquities. Source: Göpper (1996, p. 412, fig. 106:1). – *Reliefziegel mit erotischer Szene aus einem Ziegelgrab der Östlichen Han-Periode (25-220 n. Chr.) von Xinnongxiang im Kreis Xindu der Provinz Sichuan*.

the birds in the tree, may symbolize the "harmonious coexistence of humans and nature that re-awakens to a new strength in spring" (Chen Lie, 1996, p. 411).

The identities of a black primate on a tomb mural from the late second century AD (Eastern Han period) and of a grey-furred primate painted on a pre-Tang vase (i.e. dating before AD 618) are less clear (Greiff and Yin, 2002, p. 23 and fig. 36; Visser, 1926, plates I and II). These animals might represent gibbons, because they are both walking bipedally on long, slender hindlegs, but they might also be macaques, as their faces are red and they have short tails.

In the following part, I will present findings concerning paintings of gibbons. Some examples are shown in Figs. 7-28.

The earliest gibbon painting found during this survey was made by Guanxiu (832-912) (Fig. 7). It shows an arhat who is offered peaches by a gibbon. Arhats (or lohans) were disciples of the historical Buddha, which firmly establishes this painting in a Buddhistic context.

The second-oldest gibbon painting (not shown here) is known as "*Monkeys and horses*" (Palace Museum Collection, Taipei, Taiwan). It was originally attributed to Han Kan (8th ct.) but is now believed to be of more recent origin (10th ct.) (Cahill, 1960, p. 71).

A first peak in the number of gibbon paintings appears to have occurred during the Northern Song dynasty in the time slot of 1050-1075 (Fig. 2). All twelve paintings of this peak were made by, or attributed to, Yi Yuanji. As this artist's main activity period occurred in 1064-1067, all these paintings are assigned to the time slot of 1050-1075 in Fig. 2. By judging from the highly diverse styles of these paintings, however, it is unlikely that they were all made by the same artist. Some paintings attributed to Yi Yuanji are shown in Figs. 8-10.

Fig. 7. *Sixteen Arhats (Lohans) on sixteen scrolls* (one of sixteen hanging scrolls). Guanxiu (832-912, Five dynasties, China). Colour on silk. Dimensions: 128.9 x 65.8 cm. Kōdai-ji temple, Kyoto, Japan. – *Einer von "Sechzehn Arhats (Lohans) auf sechzehn Bilderrollen". Guanxiu (832-912 n. Chr., Fünf Dynastien, China)*.

Fig. 8. *Group of gibbons* (section). Attributed to Yi Yuanji (active mid-late 11th century, Northern Song dynasty, China). Handscroll. Dimensions: 32.5 x 120 cm. Osaka Municipal Museum of Art. – *Gruppe von Gibbons (Ausschnitt). Yi Yuanji zugeschrieben (Mittleres bis spätes 11. Jahrhundert, Nördliche Song-Dynastie, China)*.

Fig. 9. *A family of monkeys*. Attributed to Yi Yuanji (active mid-late 11th century, Northern Song dynasty, China). Ink and colour on silk. Dimensions: 50.5 x 82 cm. Source: Christie's (2000, p. 19, Lot 503). – *Gibbonfamilie. Yi Yuanji zugeschrieben (Mittleres bis spätes 11. Jahrhundert, Nördliche Song-Dynastie, China)*.

Fig. 10. *Gibbons and deer*. Attributed to Yi Yuanji (active mid-late 11th century, Northern Song dynasty, China). Round fan painting mounted as album leaf. Ink and colour on silk. Dimensions: 25 x 26.4 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan, No. VA15f. – *Gibbons und Hirsche. Yi Yuanji zugeschrieben (Mittleres bis spätes 11. Jahrhundert, Nördliche Song-Dynastie, China)*.

A second peak in the number of gibbon paintings appears to have occurred in the time period from 1200 to 1325, starting halfway through the Southern Song dynasty and continuing well into the Yuan dynasty. Various artists contributed to these 56 gibbon paintings, but 32 of the paintings (57%) are attributed to Muqi (c.1210-1325). Some of his paintings are shown in Figs. 1, 11, and 12. It is obvious that gibbons were more often depicted in Chinese paintings from this period than in the periods immediately before and after it.

Fig. 11. (a) *Gibbon*. Attributed to Muqi (c.1210- after 1269, Southern Song dynasty, China). Hanging scroll. Ink on silk. Dimensions: 80.6 x 38.5 cm. University of California, Berkeley Art Museum, no. CY.12. On extended loan from the Sarah Cahill Collection. – *Gibbon. Muqi zugeschrieben (c.1210- nach 1269, Südliche Song-Dynastie, China)*.

Fig. 12. *Mother Gibbon and Child*. Attributed to Muqi (c.1210- after 1269, Southern Song dynasty, China). Hanging scroll. Ink on silk. Dimensions: 75.3 x 47 cm. University of California, Berkeley Art Museum, no. CY.13. On extended loan from the Sarah Cahill Collection. – *Gibbonmutter mit Kind. Muqi zugeschrieben (c.1210- nach 1269, Südliche Song-Dynastie, China)*.

Fig. 13. *Clearing out a mountain forest* (*Battling demons in a forest*), detail. Unknown artist (Ming dynasty, 15th-16th century, China). Handscroll. Ink on paper. Dimensions of the painting: 46.7 x 807.4 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., F1917.184. Gift of Charles Lang Freer. – *Einen Bergwald ausräumen (Kampf gegen Dämonen in einem Wald). Ausschnitt aus einer horizontalen Bildrolle. Unbekannter Künstler, Ming-Dynastie, 15.-16. Jahrhundert)*.

Following the second peak described above, gibbons remained a constant, albeit infrequent topic of Chinese paintings from about 1325 to 1900. Some examples are shown in Figs. 13-18.

Wild gibbons and their habitat were disappearing fast and by the 20th century, gibbons had become extinct over most of their previously large distribution area in China. Unlike some paintings from the preceding Song dynasty, gibbons in later paintings often exhibit inaccurate anatomical features, body proportions, or positional behaviours, suggesting that the artists may have been less familiar with real gibbons. For instance, painted gibbons may exhibit a short tail (like the group of sitting gibbons in section two of Fig. 17) or a fox-like pointed snout (Fig. 18), or they may hang from a branch by their elbows or axillas, although none of these features occur in natural gibbons.

Fig. 14. *Two gibbons in a tree*. Unknown artist (Ming dynasty, 15th century, China), in the style of Yi Yuanji (active mid-late 11th century). Hanging scroll (mounted on panel). Ink and colour on silk. Dimensions: 190.7 x 100.2 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., F1911.272. Gift of Charles Lang Freer. – *Zwei Gibbons auf einem Baum. Unbekannter Künstler im Stil von Yi Yuanji (Ming-Dynastie, 15. Jahrhundert, China)*.

Fig. 15. *Leashed gibbon stealing fruit*. Unknown artist (Ming dynasty, probably early 17th century). Previously attributed to Yi Yuanji (active mid-late 11th century, China). Hanging scroll (mounted on panel). Ink and colour on silk. Dimensions: 96 x 54.2 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., F1916.47. Gift of Charles Lang Freer. – *Angeleinter Gibbon beim Früchtestehlen. Unbekannter Künstler (Ming-Dynastie, vermutlich frühes 17. Jahrhundert, China)*.

Fig. 16. *Man and servant searching for plum blossoms; gibbon in a tree*. Attributed to Wang Hui (Qing dynasty, 17th to early 18th century, China). Hanging scroll. Ink and light colour on silk. Dimensions: 92.7 x 37.5 cm. University of California, Berkeley Art Museum, no. 1990.13. Gift of James Cahill. A small gibbon hanging from a branch and observing the two men can be seen near the left margin (upper third) of the painting. – *Mann und Diener auf der Suche nach Pfirsichblüten. Wang Hui zugeschrieben (Qing-Dynastie, 17. bis frühes 18. Jahrhundert, China). Ein kleiner Gibbon hängt an einem Ast und schaut zu (linker Bildrand, oberes Bilddrittel)*.

Fig. 17. *Landscape with gibbons and cranes*. Unknown artist (Qing dynasty, 18th century, China). Previously attributed to Qiu Ying (c.1494-1557). Handscroll. Ink and colour on silk. Dimensions of the painting: 27.7 x 271.1 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., F1904.396. Gift of Charles Lang Freer. The figure shows two of three scroll sections. In the first section (not shown), there are two cranes flying in the sky above one black and one white gibbon. – *Landschaft mit Gibbons und Kranichen. Unbekannter Künstler (Qing-Dynastie, 18. Jahrhundert, China). Diese Abbildung zeigt zwei von drei Abschnitten einer horizontalen Bildrolle. Der erste, hier nicht abgebildete Abschnitt zeigt zwei Kraniche, die einen schwarzen und einen weissen Gibbon überfliegen*.

Fig. 18. *Gibbon on rock*. Wang Englong (approx c.1844, Qing dynasty, China). Fan painting converted to album leaf. Ink and colours on silk. © The Trustees of the British Museum, London, no. 1973,0917,0.59.39. Used by permission. – *Gibbon auf einem Felsen. Wang Englong (c.1844, Qing-Dynastie, China)*.

After 1900, the number of gibbon paintings/time rises abruptly and steeply until 1975, as shown in Fig. 2. A total of 189 gibbon paintings were found from the single time slot of 1975 to 1999, i.e. during the third peak. All in all, 481 gibbon paintings were created during the 20th century, which is 4.5 times the number of the known gibbon paintings dating from all previous centuries. The most prolific gibbon painter of the 20th century was Tian Shiguang (1916-1999), who produced 65 gibbon paintings (i.e. 15.3%) of the gibbon paintings of the 20th century. Liu Wanming (1968-present) is even more specialized in gibbon paintings (119 paintings were found during this survey), but only a part of his oeuvre was produced during the 20th century. To this day, he still creates gibbon paintings.

The last bar (2000-2025) in the histogram of Fig. 2 is shorter because it only includes data from the time period from 2000 to April 2008, which implies that the production rate of gibbon paintings is not necessarily on its downswing after its peak in the second half of the 1990s.

Some exemplary gibbon paintings from the 19th and 20th century are shown in Figs. 19-28.

Fig. 19. *Gibbon and peaches*. Attributed to Gao Qifeng (1888-1933, China). Hanging scroll, ink and colours on paper. Dimensions of the painting: 128.5 x 66 cm. Private collection, Switzerland. – *Gibbon und Pfirsiche. Gao Qifeng zugeschrieben (1888-1933, China)*.

Fig. 20. *Climbing gibbons*. Pu Xinyu (= Pu Ru, 1896-1963, China). Hanging scroll, ink and colours on paper. Dimensions of the painting: 94 x 33 cm. Unknown location. Source: www.jingp.com. – *Kletternde Gibbons. Pu Xinyu (= Pu Ru, 1896-1963, China)*.

Fig. 21. *Sleeping gibbon*. Zhang Daqian (1899-1983, painted c.1934, China), signed as Liang Kai (active early 13th century). Hanging scroll. Ink on paper. Dimensions: 163.7 x 67.1 cm. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Jr, S2002.6. Gift of Patricia Falk, from the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Myron S. Falk. – *Schlafender Gibbon. Zhang Daqian (1899-1983, gemalt c.1934, China), signiert als Liang Kai (Maler des frühen 13. Jahrhunderts)*.

Fig. 22. *Gibbons fetching the moon from the water*. Chen Wenxi (1906-1992, painted early 1970s, Singapore). Chinese ink and colour on paper. Dimensions of painting: 181.5 x 97 cm. National University of Singapore Museum Collection (ref. S0001-0105-001-0). – *Gibbons greifen nach dem Spiegelbild des Mondes im Wasser. Chen Wenxi (1906-1992, gemalt in den frühen 1970er Jahren, Singapore)*.

Qi Baishi (1863-1957) may have been one of the first artists to draw gibbons in what looks like a "cartoony" style, with strongly exaggerated facial expressions. Some artists like Xie Zhiguang (1900-1976) clearly patterned their gibbon paintings after his, while others developed their own "cartoony" styles when depicting gibbons, for instance Zhang Qiyi (1915-1968) or Liu Wanming (1968-present) (Figs. 24, 28). Some artists like Zhang Daqian (1899-1983), Chen Wenxi (= Chen Wen Hsi, 1906-1992), or Fang Chuxiong (1950-present) developed more naturalistic gibbon depictions (Figs. 22-23, 27) which were at least in some, and probably most, cases facilitated by the artists' access to pet gibbons or zoo gibbons.

In Chinese paintings, gibbons are often depicted solitary, or in groups of two, three or five individuals. Paintings depicting large herds of dozens of gibbons also occur (Figs. 8, 17, 22), but are uncommon. Recurrent topics include gibbons accompanying an arhat, or gibbons collecting, carrying or offering

peaches (Figs. 7, 19). A repeated theme in Song paintings is gibbons raiding a nest of egrets or herons and stealing young birds. The Buddhist theme "Gibbons reaching for the reflection of the moon" occurs as early as about AD 1200, but the theme remains uncommon in China and most paintings of this type are found in the 13th century.

Painted gibbons usually exhibit a black or dark coat with a white face-ring. White or light gibbons already occurred in the earliest gibbon paintings but remained relatively rare (Figs. 8, 10). Only occasionally, gibbons in various hues of brown, ochre, orange, yellow, or grey also occurred in Chinese paintings (Figs. 9, 17). White gibbons became much more common, however, in paintings of the 20th century (Figs. 20, 24), starting about in the 1930s with painters like Zhang Shanzi (1882-1940). Some artists like Tian Shiguang (1916-1999) actually specialized in painting white gibbons (Fig. 26). Whereas traditional Chinese gibbon paintings often are monochrome or exhibit relatively few colours, the use of bright colours become more common in gibbon paintings in the 20th century. A theme that becomes particularly popular among many gibbon painters of the 20th century, are gibbons in "autumnal trees" or trees with red leaves (Figs. 20, 24, 26, 27). The earliest dated paintings of this type stem from 1934 (Pu Xin-yu, 1896-1963) and 1935 (Zhang Shanzi, 1882-1940) (Fig. 20). Such paintings reflect the increased dominance of red colours in Chinese paintings during the 20th century.

Pre-Song objects with gibbon design or decoration were presented at the beginning of this section. Objects with gibbon designs continued to be produced later on, especially during the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), until today. Although such objects were not quantified during this study, they appeared to be much less common than similar objects in Japan. They included snuff boxes, cups, vases, tobacco jars, and porcelain figures.

Fig. 23. *Gibbons*. Chen Wenxi (1906-1992, painted c.1988, Singapore). Chinese ink and colour on paper. Dimensions of painting: 66.5 x 66.5 cm. Collection of the Art Galleries at Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, S/N 137 (ref. C-FB-D 032/0115). – *Gibbons. Chen Wenxi (1906-1992, gemalt c.1988, Singapur)*.

Fig. 24. *Red autumn leaves and a pair of gibbons*. Zhang Qiyi (1915-1968, China). Colour on paper. Dimensions: 65 x 43 cm. Unknown location. Image publication by courtesy of ARTkaoshi (www.artkaoshi.com). – *Rote Herbstblätter und ein Gibbonpaar. Zhang Qiyi (1915-1968, China)*.

Fig. 25. *Gibbon calling on oak tree*. Xie Zhiliu (1910-1997, China, painted 1947). Hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk. Dimensions: 105 x 51 cm. Unknown location. Source: Christie's (2007, p. 216, Lot 1207). – *Rufender Gibbon auf Eichenbaum. Xie Zhiliu (1910-1997, China, gemalt 1947)*.

Fig. 26. *White gibbon with autumn leaves*. Tian Shiguang (1916-1999, China). Hanging scroll, ink and colour on paper. Dimensions: 132 x 64 cm. Unknown location. Source: www.zhuokearts.com. – *Weisser Gibbon mit Herbstblättern. Tian Shiguang (1916-1999, China)*.

Fig. 27. *Hearing the gibbons from an autumnal mountain*. Fang Chuxiong (1950-present, painted 1988, China). Ink and colour on paper. Dimensions: 68.5 x 136.5 cm. Unknown location. Source: http://artso.artron.net – *Gibbonrufe klingen vom Herbstwald. Fang Chuxiong (1950-heute, gemalt 1988, China)*.

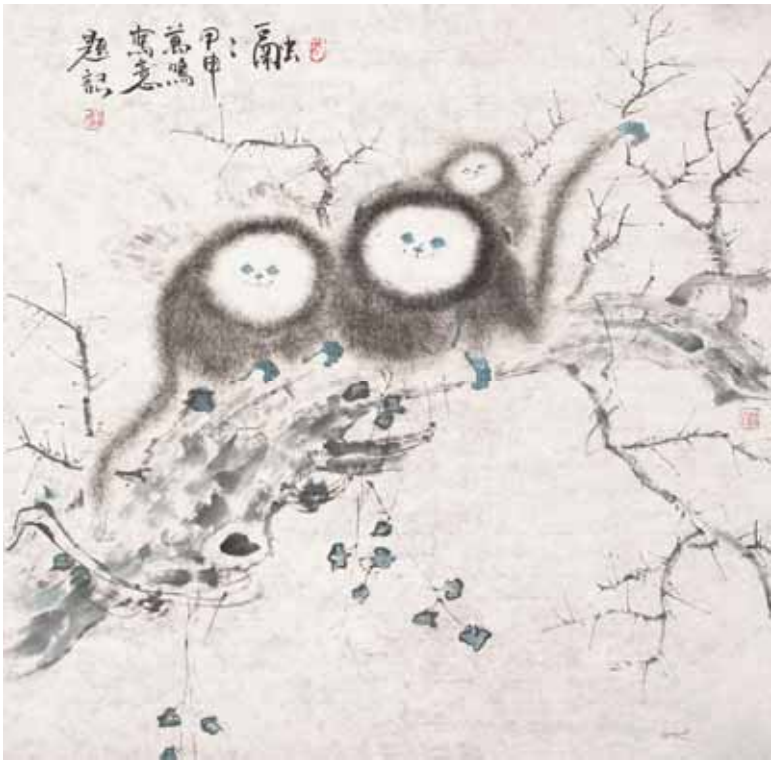

Fig. 28. *Happiness*. Liu Wanming (1968-present, China). Ink and colour on paper. Dimensions: 69 x 69 cm. Unknown location. Source: www.zhuokearts.com. – *Glück. Liu Wanming (1968-heute, China)*.

Japan

Figure 29 shows the temporal distribution of the 172 Japanese gibbon paintings found during this survey versus time.

The earliest known gibbon painting is attributed to Kyōdō Kakuen (1244-1306) and bears an inscription by Jingtang Jueyuan (= Ching-t'ang Chüeh-yüan, 1244-1306), who came to Japan in 1279 (Toda Teisuke, 1973, p. 171, fig. 73). The second known painting is a scroll depicting the *Death of the historical Buddha* in the Langen collection (Germany). It was made by an unknown artist and is dated to the Kamakura period of the 14th century (Miyeka, 1998, pp. 18-19).

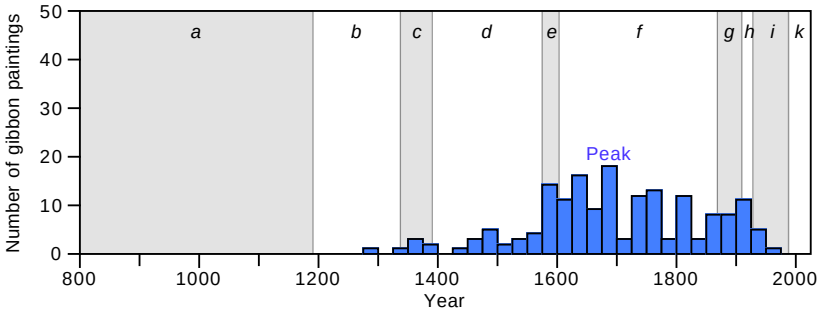

Fig. 29. Distribution of Japanese gibbon paintings versus time. Data: all known paintings until April 2008 (*n* = 172 paintings). Each blue bar represents the known gibbon paintings of a time period of 25 years. Alternating grey and white bars in the background represent the following periods in Japanese chronology: (*a*) Heian: 794-1192; (*b*) Kamakura: 1192-1334; (*c*) Nambokucho: 1334-1392; (*d*) Muromachi: 1392-1573; (*e*) Azuchi-Momoyama: 1573-1603; (*f*) Edo: 1603-1868; (*g*) Meiji: 1868-1912; (*h*) Taisho: 1912-1926; (*i*) Showa: 1926-1989; (*k*) Heisei: 1989-present. – *Geschichtliche Verbreitung von Gibbon-Gemälden in Japan (n = 172 Bilder). Jeder blaue Balken entspricht einem Zeitraum von 25 Jahren*.

From the 14th to the 16th century, the number of gibbon paintings is increasing relatively steadily in time (Fig. 29). The output reaches a peak during the 17th century and then diminishes more or less steadily until the end of the 20th century. No gibbon paintings produced after 1970 were found during this survey.

During about 700 years, gibbons enjoyed a continued presence in Japanese paintings, and no clear temporal subdivisions can be recognized from the frequency distribution shown in Fig. 29. It should be noticed, however, that the data set of Japanese gibbon paintings (*n* = 172) available for this study is more than three times smaller than that for China (*n* = 636). Likewise, the time period during which gibbon paintings were produced is much shorter for Japan than for China. Interestingly, a comparison between Figs. 2 and 29 reveals that consistently more gibbon paintings are available from Japan than from China during the time period from 1525 to 1900.

Several examples of the Japanese gibbon paintings are shown in Figs. 30-42. No single artist appears to have played a dominant role in the output of the Japanese gibbon paintings. The best represented artists in this data set are Hakuin Ekaku (1685-1768) and Hashimoto Kansetsu (1883-1945), who each contributed nine paintings (Figs. 39 and 42).

Like in China, gibbons painted by Japanese artists usually exhibit a black or dark coat with a white face-ring. Light gibbons occur in many paintings, but remain a minority. Most Japanese gibbon paintings are monochrome or exhibit few colours. The majority of the paintings depict the theme of the "Gibbon reaching for the moon" or "Gibbon reaching for the reflection of the moon in the water". Paintings of gibbon chains – i.e. gibbons hanging down from trees attached to one another in chains to touch the reflection of the moon – are quite common (Fig. 38).

As a general trend in Japanese gibbon painting, gibbons were often depicted as cuddly hairballs with big, round, fluffy heads and very small faces (Fig. 31, 35). As another trend, artists like Tawaraya Sotatsu (1600-1640), Hakuin Ekaku (1685-1768) or Ogata Gekko (1900-1911) depicted gibbons with increasingly long arms (Fig. 41).

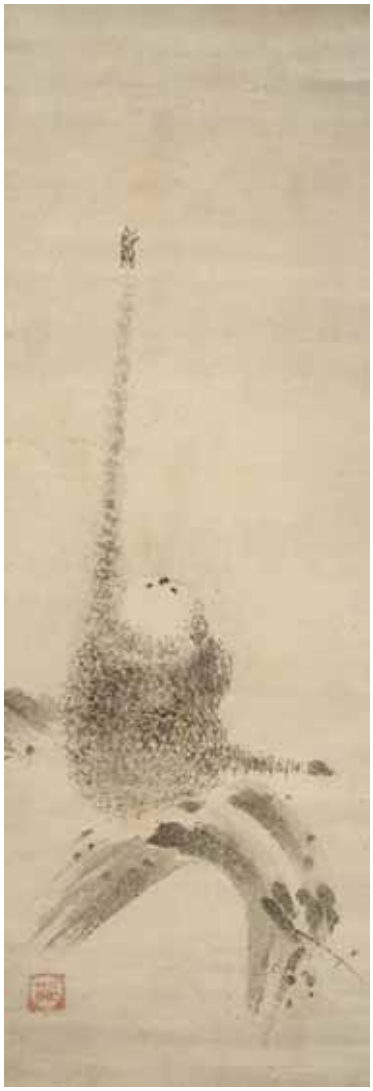

Fig. 30. *Gibbon*. Shugetsu (1440?-1529, Muromachi period, Japan). Hanging scroll. Ink on paper. Dimensions of the painting: 93.8 x 32.8 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., F1996.29. Gift of Mary Keetch and Charles L. Vincent. – *Gibbon. Shugetsu (1440?-1529, Muromachi-Periode, Japan)*.

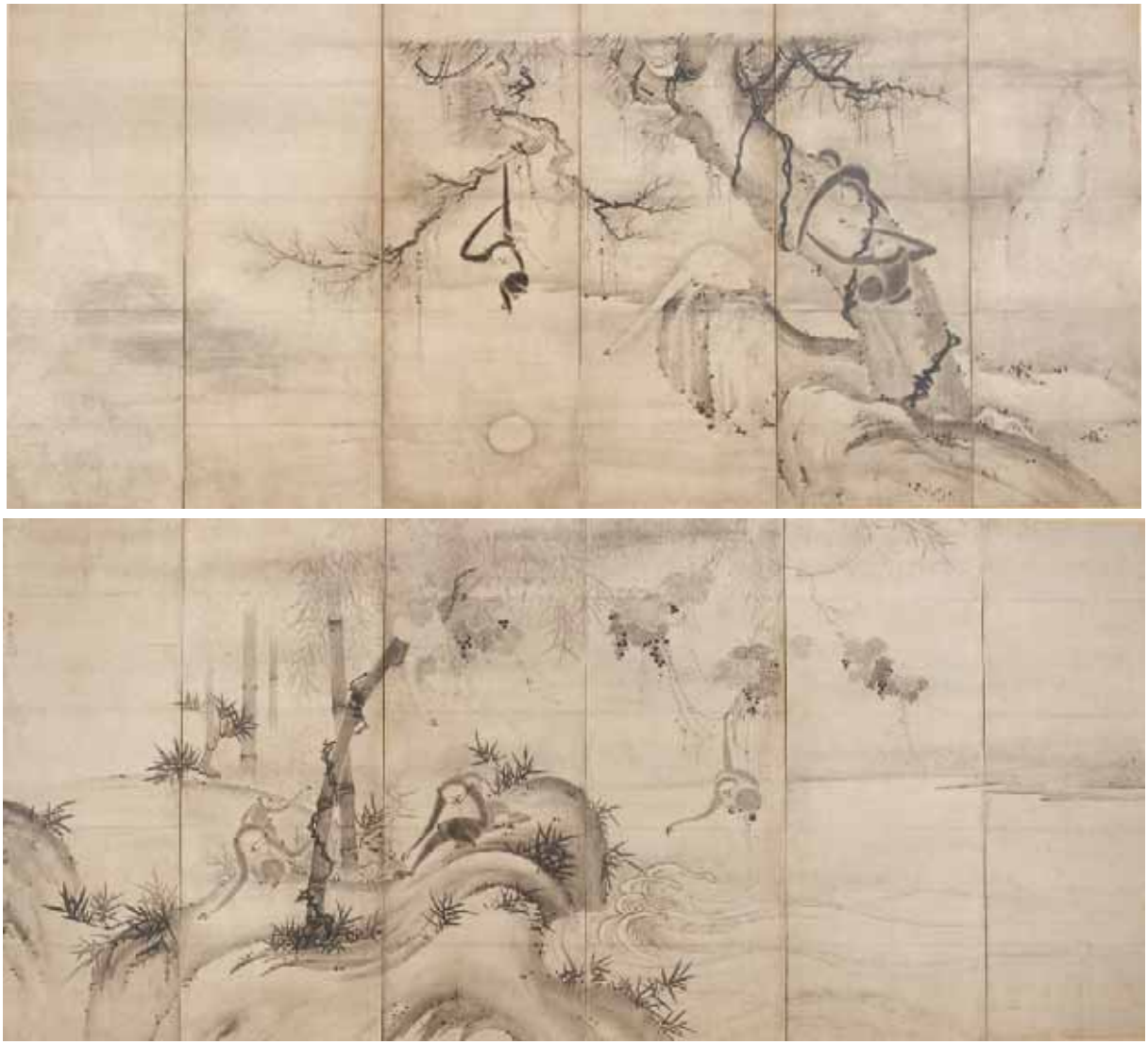

Fig. 31. *Monkeys and trees on a river bank*. Attributed to Sesson Shukei (1504-1589) or Sesson school (Momoyama period, 1573-1615, Japan). Pair of six-panel screens. Ink on paper. Dimensions of each screen: 176.5 x 371.1 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., F1903.218-.219. Gift of Charles Lang Freer. – *Affen und Bäume am Flussufer. Sesson Shukei zugeschrieben (1504-1589) oder Sesson-Schule (Momoyama-Periode, 1573-1615, Japan)*.

Fig. 32. *Gibbons and a bamboo grove*. Hasegawa Tohaku (1539-1610, Momoyama period, Japan). This is the left screen of a pair of six-panel screens; the right screen (not shown) depicts a bamboo grove, without gibbons. Ink and gold on paper. Dimensions of each screen: 154.0 x 361.8 cm. Collection of the Shôkoku-ji Temple, Japan. – *Gibbons und ein Bambushain. Hasegawa Tohaku (1539-1610, Momoyama-Periode, Japan)*.

Fig. 33. *Monkey*. Unknown artist (around 1600, Momoyama period, Japan). Ink on paper. Dimensions: 98.1 x 42 cm. Museum of East Asian Art in Cologne, Germany, Inv. no. A 77,48. Gift of Kurt Brasch. – *Affe. Unbekannter Künstler (um 1600, Momoyama-Periode, Japan)*.

Fig. 34. *Mother gibbon reaching for the moon*. Unknown artist Hasegawa school (around 1600, Momoyama period, Japan). Ink on heavy paper. Dimensions of scroll: 119.4 x 51.4 cm. Private collection of the late Gordon Smith (Los Angeles, California). A forged Sesshu signature and stamp were added to deceive potential buyers. This painting may have been part of a sliding door or wall painting, judging by the unusually thick paper. – *Gibbonmutter versucht, den Mond zu fassen. Unbekannter Künstler, Hasegawa-Schule (um 1600, Momoyama-Periode, Japan)*.

Fig. 35. *Twelve gibbons reaching for the moon*. Unknown artist, Hasegawa school (around 1610, Edo period, Japan). Folding fan mounted on scroll. Opaque colours on gold leaf. Dimensions of scroll: 48.3 x 21.6 cm. Private collection of the late Gordon Smith (Los Angeles, California). – *Zwölf Gibbons versuchen, den Mond zu fassen. Unbekannter Künstler, Hasegawa-Schule (um 1610, Edo-Periode, Japan)*.

Fig. 36. *Kannon and gibbons*. Kano Naonobu (1607-1650) and Kano Tsunenobu (1636-1713, Edo period, Japan). The gibbon paintings form the two lateral elements of a triptych, with the central piece (not shown) depicting Kannon, the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy. Hanging scrolls, ink on paper. Dimensions of each scroll: 118.5 x 49.7 cm. The University Art Museum, Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music. Catalogue no. 1916-25577, classification no. 1916. – *Kannon und Gibbons. Kano Naonobu (1607-1650) und Kano Tsunenobu (1636-1713, Edo-Periode, Japan). Die beiden Gibbonbilder sind die Seitenbilder eines Triptychons. Die mittlere Bildrolle (hier nicht abgebildet), zeigt Kannon, die buddhistische Göttin der Gnade*.

Fig. 37. *Monkeys playing on oak branches*. Hasegawa School (1615-1868, Edo period, Japan). Pair of hanging scrolls, ink and colours on paper. Dimensions of each painting: 177.5 x 138.4 cm. Gift and Purchase from the Harry G. C. Packard Collection Charitable Trust in honour of Dr. Shujiro Shimada; The Avery Brundage Collection, 1991.62.1 (right) and 1991.62.2 (left). © Asian Art Museum of San Francisco. Used by permission. Although the museum title of the two paintings refers to monkeys, the artist was obviously depicting gibbons. The paintings' large scale and evidence on each that a door-catch has been removed attest that they were once sliding doors (*fusuma*). – *Spielende Affen auf Eichenästen. Unbekannter Künstler, Hasegawa-Schule (1615-1868, Edo-Periode, Japan)*.

Fig. 38. *Gibbon chain*. Kano Minenobu (1662-1708, Edo period, Japan). Ink and light colours on silk. Dimensions of painting 99.1 x 31.1 cm. Private collection of the late Gordon Smith (Los Angeles, California). – *Gibbon-Kette. Kano Minenobu (1662-1708, Edo-Periode, Japan)*.

Fig. 39. *Long-armed Monkey*. Hakuin Ekaku (1685-1768, Japan). Hanging scroll, ink on paper. Dimensions: 117.3 x 57.4 cm. Eisei-Bunko Museum, Tokyo. – *Langarmiger Affe. Hakuin Ekaku (1685-1768, Japan)*.

Fig. 40. *Monkeys*. Made after Morikage Kusumi (c.1620-1690; print created c.1930s, Showa period, Japan). Signature: zen Hokusai l'itsu. Woodcut print from the Robert O. Muller Estate, colour on paper. Publisher Distributor: Shima Art Company. Dimensions: 17 x 39 cm. Image publication by courtesy of artelino Gmbh. – *Affen. Nach Morikage Kusumi (c.1620-1690; Holzschnitt hergestellt c.1930er Jahre, Showa-Periode, Japan)*.

As mentioned above, early Japanese depictions of gibbons were strongly influenced by Chinese paintings. Interestingly, an influence in the opposite direction did also occur to some extent during the 20th century, as gibbon paintings by the famous Japanese artist Hashimoto Kansetsu (1883-1945) (Fig. 42) inspired several Chinese artists such as Hu Zaobin (1897-1942), Wang Zhaoxiang (1910-1988), Zhao Yunyu (1916-2003).

Objects decorated with gibbon designs, although not quantitatively evaluated in this study, appear to be more common in Japan than in China or Korea. Especially during the Edo period (1603-1868) and the Meiji period (1868-1912), gibbons were depicted on a multitude of objects including writing utensil boxes (*suzuribako*), lacquerware medicine boxes (*inro*), cigarette boxes, perfume boxes, incense boxes, carved toggles (*netsuke*), paper knifes, jewellery, dishes, tea cups, tea kettles, metal sword guards (*tsuba*) and sword pommels (*fuchikashira*), handles of small blades (*kozuka*), and body armour. As in Japanese gibbon paintings, the most common theme of these gibbon designs is “Gibbon reaching for the moon”.

Fig. 41. *Monkey and the moon reflection*. Ogata Gekko (1859-1920, created c.1900, Meiji period, Japan). Woodcut print from the Robert O. Muller Estate, colour on paper. Publisher: Daikoku-ya (Tokyo, 1818-1923). Dimensions: 24.0 x 24.5 cm (*shikishiban* format). Image publication by courtesy of artelino Gmbh. – *Affe und die Spiegelung des Mondes. Ogata Gekko (1859-1920, Holzschnitt hergestellt c.1900, Meiji-Periode, Japan)*.

Fig. 42. *Black gibbons*. Hashimoto Kansetsu (1883-1945, painted 1933, Japan). Colour on silk. Dimensions: 139.9 x 158.0 cm. The University Art Museum, Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music. Catalogue number 1983-459, classification no. 960. – *Schwarze Gibbons. Hashimoto Kansetsu (1883-1945, gemalt 1933, Japan)*.

Korea

Only 14 gibbon paintings from Korea were found during this study. They are distributed across the time period from 1550 to 1950, as shown in Fig. 43.

The small sample size does not allow to recognize the presence of a pattern of occurrence in time (if any), but it may be mentioned that none of the Korean paintings falls outside the temporal distribution range of gibbon paintings in Japan (see Fig. 29). The artist's name is known for only eight of these paintings, and only two of these artists produced more than one gibbon painting (Yun Duseo, $n = 2$, and Jang Seung-eop, $n = 2$).

Some examples of the Korean gibbon paintings are shown in Figs. 44-47.

Gibbons in Korean paintings exhibit a great variability in anatomy and fur colouration, often depicting features that do not naturally occur in gibbons, including gibbons that do not hang from a branch by their hands but by their axillas (Fig. 45), gibbons with unusually flat heads and long snouts (Fig. 46), or gibbons with short tails (Fig. 47).

Five of the paintings depict gibbons holding or gathering peaches (Daoist symbols of longevity). Only one painting can be placed in a Buddhist context as it combines the gibbon or gibbon-like animal with a Buddhist monk.

Objects with gibbon design include porcelain jars from the 17th and 18th centuries decorated with grapes and gibbons.

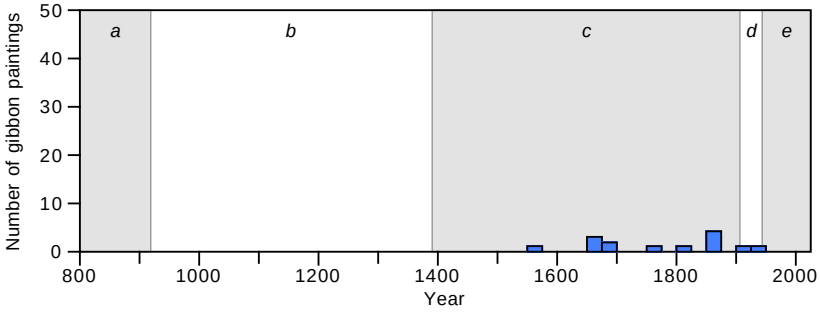

Fig. 43. Distribution of Korean gibbon paintings versus time. Data: all known paintings until April 2008 (*n* = 14 paintings). Each blue bar represents the known gibbon paintings of a time period of 25 years. Alternating grey and white bars in the background represent the following periods in Korean chronology: (*a*) Unified (or Great) Silla dynasty: 668-918; (*b*) Koryo dynasty: 918-1392; (*c*) Yi (or Choson) dynasty: 1392-1910; (*d*) Japanese colonial period: 1910-1945; (*e*) 1945-present. – *Geschichtliche Verbreitung von Gibbon-Gemälden in Korea (n = 14 Bilder). Jeder blaue Balken entspricht einem Zeitraum von 25 Jahren*.

Fig. 44 (left). *Gibbons and deer*. Attributed to Yun Om (1536-1581, Korea). Colour on silk. Dimensions: 178.5 x 109.7 cm. National Museum of Korea, Seoul. – *Gibbons und Hirsch. Yun Om zugeschrieben (1536-1581, Korea)*.

Fig. 45 (below). *Swinging gibbon*. Yun Duseo (= Kong-jae) (1668-1718, Korea). Dimensions of scroll: 22 x 19 cm. Ink on silk. Collection of The Honorable and Mrs. Joseph P. Carroll. Photo: Thierry Ollivier / Musée des arts asiatiques Guimet, Paris, 136_04K233. – *Hängender Gibbon. Yun Duseo (= Kong-jae) (1668-1718, Korea)*.

Fig. 46. *Two gibbons in a tree*. Kim Ikchu (Kyongam) (probably around late 18th /early 19th century, Korea). Dimensions: 26.6 x 19 cm. National Museum of Korea, Seoul. – *Zwei Gibbons auf einem Baum. Kim Ikchu (= Kyongam, vermutlich spätes 18./ frühes 19. Jahrhundert, Korea)*.

Fig. 47. *Gibbon*. Lee Yongwoo (1904-1952, painted 1940, Korea.). Colour on paper. Dimensions: 54 x 57 cm. Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul. – *Gibbon. Lee Yongwoo (1904-1952, gemalt 1940, Korea)*.

Temporal distribution and individual output of gibbon artists

As demonstrated above (Figs. 2 and 29), several distinct peaks in the number of gibbon paintings can be distinguished in Chinese and Japanese art history. The occurrence of similar maxima in Korean gibbon paintings cannot be assessed because of the small size of the Korean sample.

In order to eliminate individual differences in productivity, Fig. 48 shows the temporal distribution of all Chinese and Japanese gibbon painters identified during this survey versus time. The resulting two histograms closely resemble the plots of paintings versus time (Figs. 2 and 29), demonstrating that the peaks in productivity are not only the result of the high output of few individual artists. Only the first peak is not visible in Fig. 48a, because it consisted solely of paintings attributed to one single painter (Yi Yuanji).

Figure 48b suggests that the temporal distribution of Japanese gibbon painters may exhibit a second peak during the first half of the 19th century. This was not obvious in the temporal distribution of Japanese gibbon paintings shown in Fig. 29.

In order to study the productivity of the various painters, I determined the number of gibbon paintings found for every Chinese and Japanese gibbon artist and plotted it versus the main activity period or mid-life time of each artist (Fig. 49). A total of 25 Chinese and 29 Japanese paintings were excluded from this part of the study, because their authorship was unknown. Whereas the Chinese paintings of unknown authorship are about evenly distributed across the whole production period of Chinese gibbon paintings, with a weakly defined peak in the 13th/14th centuries ($n = 6$ and 5, respectively), Japanese paintings of unknown authorship show a similar frequency distribution as the whole sample of Japanese paintings, with the majority of them ($n = 10$ paintings) clustered in the time period of the 17th century.

Figure 49a reveals that the first peak in the number of Chinese gibbon paintings consists of twelve paintings by one single painter (Yi Yuanji).

The second peak is created by the productivity of several artists, although most of them contribute only one gibbon painting. The majority of paintings of this peak is produced by the painter and Chan monk Muqi ($n = 32$). The clustering of gibbon painters that were active during this second peak may be underrepresented in the graph because most of the excluded paintings of unknown authorship were created in exactly this time period.

The third peak of Chinese gibbon paintings exhibits both a massive surge in the individual output of some painters as well as a drastic increase in the number of gibbon painters.

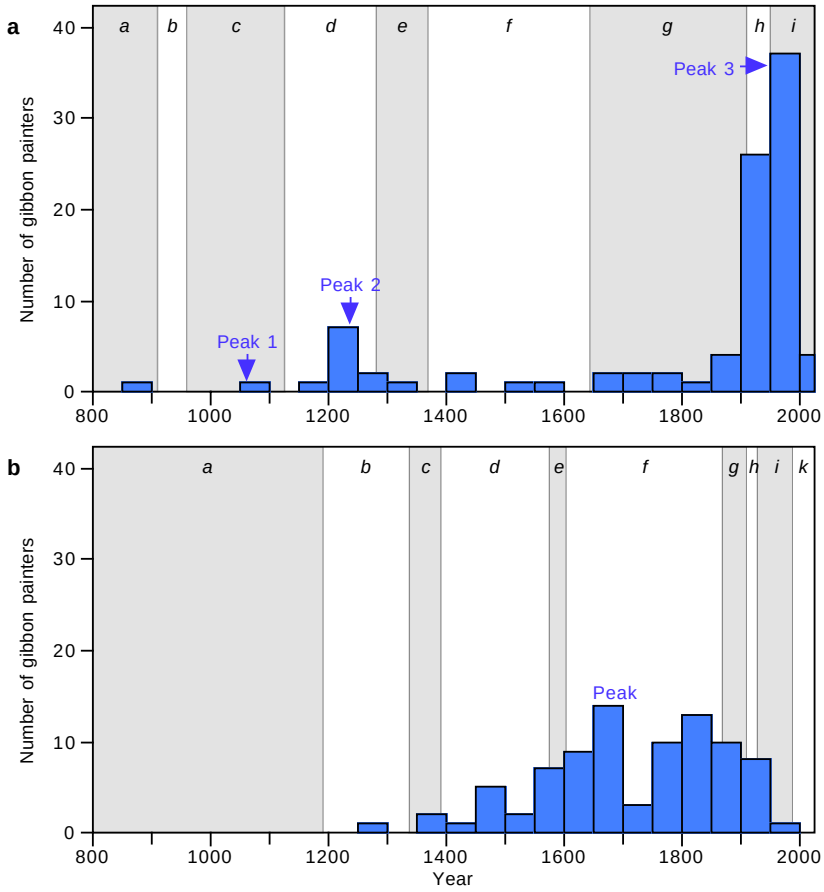

Fig. 48. Number of Chinese (a) and Japanese (b) gibbon painters versus the main activity period or midlife time of the artist. Data: All known artists until April 2008 (n = 95 Chinese and 86 Japanese artists). Each blue bar represents the known gibbon paintings of a time period of 50 years. Peak labels, alternating grey and white bars in the background and abbreviations as in Figs. 2 and 29, respectively. – *Anzahl identifizierter Gibbonmaler, aufgetragen gegen die Lebens- oder Aktivitätszeit der jeweiligen Künstler. Jeder blaue Balken entspricht einem Zeitraum von 50 Jahren. Datensatz: (a) 95 chinesische und (b) 86 japanische Künstler*.

The four most prolific Chinese painters (Liu Wanming, Tian Shiguang, Chen Wenxi, and Fang Chuxiong) contributed together 286 paintings, which represents about 45% of all Chinese gibbon paintings. The main activity period of each of these painters is relatively recent (20th or 21st century).

The Japanese peak in the number of gibbon paintings roughly coincides with the main activity period of the painter and Zen monk Hakuin Ekaku (n = 9 paintings).

The four most prolific Japanese gibbon painters are Hakuin Ekaku, Hashimoto Kansetsu, Kano Tanyu, and one of seven painters who each are represented with four paintings in this sample. Together, they contributed only 24 paintings, which represents about 16% of all Japanese gibbon paintings. The main activity period of these painters occurred in the time period from about 1575 to 1800 (Fig. 49b); only one of them (Hashimoto Kansetsu, 1883-1945, Fig. 42) had his main activity period in the 20th century.

Figure 49 suggests that the individual output of each artist is not evenly distributed in the sample. It appears as if many Chinese artists since the 20th century were specialized in painting gibbons, whereas most earlier Chinese and Japanese artists produced only few gibbon paintings each. In order to verify this statistically, the sample used for Fig. 49 was divided into three groups: (1) Chinese painters before 1900 (n = 29 artists), (2) Chinese painters after 1900 (n = 66), and (3) Japanese painters (n = 86). A statistical comparison of the numbers of paintings by each artist using ANOVA (and a significance threshold of 0.05) revealed a significant difference among the three groups (df = 2, $p < 0.004$). Scheffe's *post-hoc* test revealed a significant difference between Groups (2) and (3) ($p = 0.005$), but no significance between Groups (1) and (2), and Groups (1) and (3), respectively ($p > 0.05$ in each comparison). If the two early Chinese gibbon painters Yi Yuanji and Muqi are excluded, the comparison between Groups (1) and (2) also becomes statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Apparently, it is Group (2) which differs most from the other groups, suggesting that the average individual output of Chinese gibbon painters may have changed (increased) around the beginning of the 20th century.

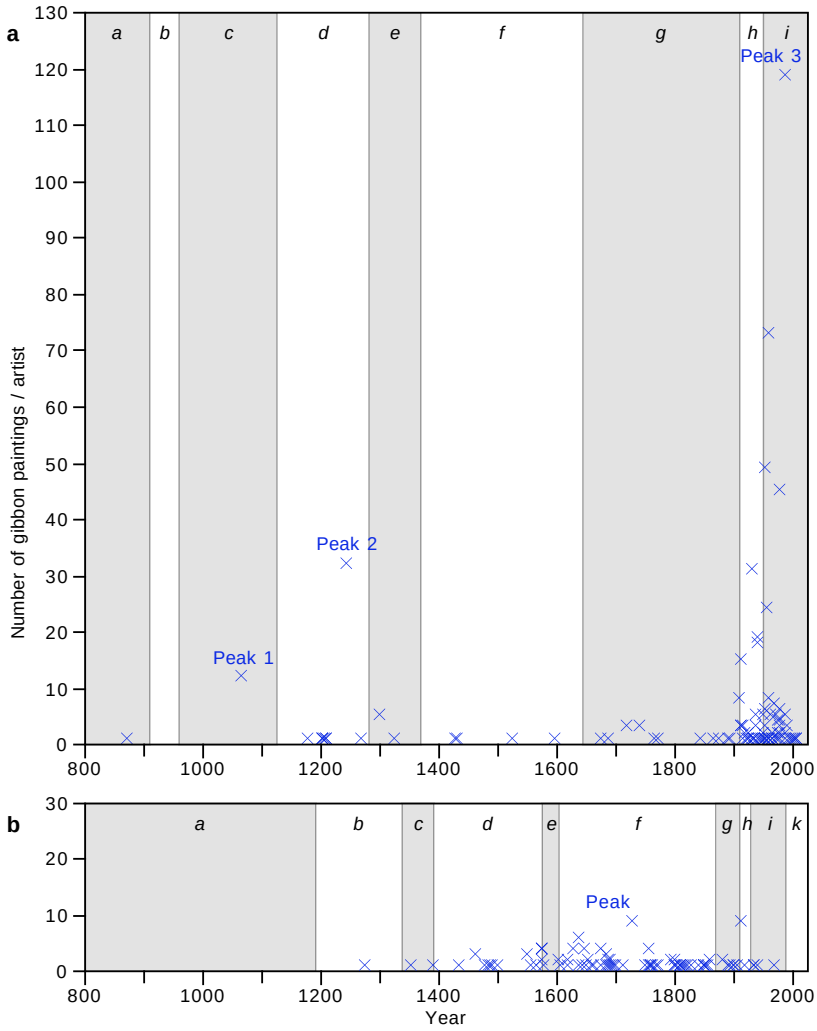

Fig. 49. Number of gibbon paintings for every Chinese (a) and Japanese (b) gibbon artist versus the main activity period or midlife time of the artist. Data: Each cross represents all known paintings of one artist until April 2008 (n = 95 Chinese and 86 Japanese artists). Peak labels, alternating grey and white bars in the background and abbreviations as in Figs. 2 and 29, respectively. – *Anzahl Gibbonbilder, die von jedem chinesischen und japanischen Künstler gemalt wurden, aufgetragen gegen die Lebens- oder Aktivitätszeit der jeweiligen Künstler. Jedes Kreuz entspricht einem Künstler. Datensatz: (a) 95 chinesische und (b) 86 japanische Künstler*.

Discussion and Conclusions

China

Paintings of gibbons collecting or carrying peaches, and gibbons associating with lohans (*arhats* in Sanskrit) reoccur throughout the whole history of Chinese gibbon paintings. The earliest gibbon painting found during this study already depicts a lohan who is offered peaches by a gibbon. In early Buddhism, lohans were considered as disciples who practiced and cultivated the Buddhist faith on their own. In later periods, however, they became revered as popular figures of salvation similar to bodhisattvas. In paintings, they were often situated in remote landscapes and often shown in association with certain animals and plants that played a role in overcoming the limits of ordinary life, such as gibbons and peaches (Fang Jing Pei, 2004).

The gibbon itself is associated with the wisdom of long life and the attainment of other-worldly knowledge. The peach is the divine fruit of immortality. Peach trees blossom in the early spring amid the snow, and so peaches are associated with endurance and long life. A magic grove of peach trees, which blossomed only once in three thousand years, was cultivated by the Daoist divinity the Queen Mother of the West (Xi Wang Mu) (Fang Jing Pei, 2004; Silbergeld, 1987). Eating a peach from her mythical garden was said to assure a life span of a thousand years. Paintings combining gibbons (a symbol of longevity) with peaches have a long tradition in China. Portrayed together, they represented a wish for longevity.

Even in modern China, gibbons are of continued relevance as a symbol of longevity and endurance. This is documented by the production of batteries with the brand name “Changbiyuan” (i.e. long-armed ape or gibbon) by the Kunming Battery Factory, Majie, Xijiao, Kunming, Yunnan province. The factory was established in 1956, and the batteries were still in use during my last field survey of gibbons in Yunnan Province in 2007 (Fig. 50).

Fig. 50. Batteries with the brand name "Changbiyuan" (i.e. long-armed ape or gibbon) produced by the Kunming Battery Factory, Majie (Xijiao, Kunming, Yunnan province). Photo: Thomas Geissmann. – *Batterien unter dem Markennamen "Changbiyuan" (d.h. langarmiger Affe oder Gibbon) werden auch heute noch von der Kunming-Batterie-Fabrik in Majie (Xijiao, Kunming, Provinz Yunnan) hergestellt. Dies belegt die fortdauernde Bedeutung, welche die Gibbons als Symbole für Langlebigkeit und Ausdauer in China innehaben.*

As notable change during of the 20th century, gibbon paintings began to feature increasing amounts of red colour, usually in the form of trees with red autumnal leaves. The earliest gibbon paintings of this type are dated from 1934, but as the date of most Chinese paintings is not exactly known, the preference for red colour may have started earlier. The trend is neither specific for gibbon paintings, nor to paintings of the flowers and birds genre, but was noticeable in all genres of painting.

Chinese art of the last 50 years was strongly tied to the political direction of communist China, if not an instrument of politics. Gibbons were usually painted or partially painted in ink, and ink paintings were the expressive medium of the traditionalists or artists that went into exile because of changed political situation. Before the Anti-Rightist Campaign of the year 1958, ink painting was considered an approved artistic medium which – widely unchanged and unquestioned – retained the traditional colour- and form-language. Ink painting remained welcome as long as it did not drift into surreal or abstract art. Only when artists had to fear being stigmatized as right elements or intellectuals did they change the colour palette, in which case they tended to adopt red as the dominant colour, avoiding wet black ink and, instead, inking only in grey tones. The red flag waving over China united everything. The inherent symbolism and the trick to use red as the often only bright colour for all intents and purposes served political requirements (Hesemann, 2006).

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the leader of the Chinese Communist party and the first Chairman of the PRC, Mao Zedong (1892-1976) had called on China's artists to subjugate their creative impulses to serve the communist party through agit-prop and other Mao-motifed works (Andrews, 1994; Hyer and Billingsley, 2005; Pomfret, 2007). Ideology was an important aspect of the arts and many artists devoted themselves to the study of the poems composed by Mao Zedong. The poems depicted the country's entrance into a new era in which people lived joyfully and had a proper livelihood. They attracted many artists of the time and played a crucial role in the content of paintings, especially in the 1950s and the 1960s; it provided those suffering artists a precious space for creation (Siu Fun-Kee, 2007). For instance, the sentence "All the mountains are blanketed in red, and forests are totally dyed" comes from Mao Zedong's poem *Chang Sha* (*To the Tune of Spring Beaming in a Garden*). It was written in 1925 and published in 1957. The cited sentence was a most welcome and many painters depicted autumnal mountains with red leaves. Overseas art historians have termed such paintings "Red landscapes" and attribute to them political meanings and characteristics of the time when China was under the rule of the "red" regime (Siu Fun-Kee, 2007). The sentenced may also have fuelled the production of paintings depicting gibbons in autumnal trees.

Most painted gibbons exhibited a black coat and a white face ring. White gibbons were depicted less often, but became more common from 1934 on, which corresponds to the time when red became a favourite colour in gibbon paintings. In the ancient Chinese concepts of colour, the colour white represents multiple things (Fang Jing Pei, 2004). In Chinese culture colours corresponded with the five primary elements, the directions and the four seasons. White was associated with metal, west, and autumn. This colour also corresponded to gold, and was the symbol for transparency, brightness, clarity, purification, fullness, justice, or punishment. Finally, white was linked to the activities of killing and destruction. White, in most cases, is the opposite colour of red (Keller, 1996; Zhou, 2006). Although gibbons occur in numerous fur colourations, purely white gibbons have not been described so far (Geissmann, 1995); the lightest gibbon fur colours are yellow or blonde. The artists' growing preference for white gibbons probably had a symbolic meaning. If the gibbon was a symbol of longevity and endurance, a white gibbon probably was a particularly pure form of the same symbol. If white was a symbol of autumn, the combination of a white gibbon with autumnal red tree foliage may have been a particularly strong association with autumn. As autumn was also the season to crusade and to execute criminals (Zhou, 2006), it is tempting to speculate that this type of paintings may also have included a political allusion.

Whereas the distribution range of the gibbons in the 10th century extended over much of China as far north as the Yellow River at the 35th parallel of latitude, Chinese gibbons lost most of their habitat in the following centuries (Van Gulik, 1967) and today occur only in few small relic populations limited to southern Yunnan, and one minuscule population each

in Guangxi province and on Hainan island (Geissmann, 2007). As a result, gibbon artists had less and less access to their subjects. They had to rely increasingly on classical Song paintings in order to see what gibbons looked like. Consequently, many painted gibbons during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing dynasties (1644-1911) began to exhibit anatomical features or positional behaviour that do not occur in gibbons. Artists who knew gibbons only from hearsay began to confuse them with macaques or other monkeys. In many secondary pictures of gibbons – drawn by artists who had not seen actual specimens – the apes are provided with small tails. Chen Wenxi (1906-1992) was awed by the lifelike quality of a print of one of Muqi's gibbon paintings (the triptych described in the Introduction section, Fig. 1) and studied it in order to emulate the painting. Chen had never seen a gibbon when he was in China, and as a result he did not realize that gibbons, unlike monkeys, have no tails. It was only much later in the late-1940s, that a foreigner pointed out this error in his painting, and corrected him (nafahub.com, 2008; Wikipedia contributors, 2008). As noted by Van Gulik (1967, p. 33), "it seems that the Chinese could not reconcile themselves to the idea that there existed a tail-less primate," but paintings of gibbons with short tails were also produced by Japanese and Korean artists that were obviously unfamiliar with actual gibbons.

In the 20th century, however, some gibbon painters began to keep gibbons as pets in order to benefit from the inspiration provided by watching them. For instance, Zhang Daqian (1899-1983) obtained his first gibbon in 1945, while he was still living in China, from a friend in Singapore. Zhang was said to have raised about thirty gibbons during his lifetime, and when he lived on a large estate in Brazil "during the 1950s and 1960s, the space and favourable climate made it possible for him to rear ten gibbons, the largest group he ever had" (Fu and Stuart, 1991, p. 162). Similarly, Chen Wenxi (1906-1992) began to specialize in gibbon paintings after he settled in Singapore in 1948. He is reported saying: "I used to admire the paintings of gibbons of Muqi, especially the way he executed the furs, so delicate and so true to life, and I concluded that these results were possible only by close and prolonged watching of real-life models. So in Singapore, when I saw one day a gibbon, I bought it to be my model. This was followed by half a dozen other gibbons, which I bought at different times – black, white, grey, all kinds, which I have incorporated into a number of my works" (nafahub.com, 2008). Examples of Chen Wenxi's gibbon paintings are shown in Figs. 22-23.

This study shows that the production rates of gibbon paintings in China and Japan exhibit different trends and fluctuations.

In China, gibbon paintings are found from the 9th century until present. This is much earlier than suggested by previous publications, which usually assume that gibbon painting as a genre developed during the Northern Song dynasty (960-1126) (Bai, 1999; Van Gulik, 1968). Furthermore, gibbons depicted on belt buckles and relief bricks date back to at least the Han dynasty (206 BC-AD 220), with one silvery jewel in the shape of a long-armed primate not reliably identifiable as a gibbon dating back to the Warring States period (475-221 BC). Artefacts such these suggest that gibbons already played an important role in Chinese culture well before the Song dynasty. Finally, references to gibbons are plentiful in all literary forms from the Han dynasty (202 BC-AD 221) onwards (Van Gulik, 1967; Lovell, 1981). This evidence suggests that paintings of gibbons, too, may have been produced much earlier than the 9th century, but none were preserved until the present time.

At least three marked peaks in the production rate of gibbon paintings can be discerned in China. It is generally accepted that an increased preference for animal and flower paintings occurred during the Song period, and it has been pointed out that "Gibbons had been a staple subject of the Song Academy, and many examples of the genre by the Song masters were in the imperial collection" (Barnhart, 1996, p. 339). The data collected for this study suggests, however, that gibbon painting during the Song period falls into two distinct periods, each with its own distinct peak. The first peak occurred in 1050-1075 and is related to the successful career of the Northern Song painter Yi Yuanji (active in the 1060s), who is generally identified as the first painter to specialize in depicting gibbons (Bai Qianshen, 1999; Lovell, 1981; Van Gulik, 1968). This assessment may or may not be correct, but Yi Yuanji was certainly the first to achieve fame for his depictions of gibbons (Barnhart *et al.*, 1997). He was so famous as a gibbon painter, that the Emperor Yingzong (reigned 1064-1068) commissioned him to paint *One Hundred Gibbons* on the walls of one of the halls in the Imperial Palace, but he died before finishing the painting (Van Gulik, 1967). The imperial collection in the early 12th century reportedly contained 245 works by Yi Yuanji, of which 114 were gibbon and monkey paintings (Lovell, 1981, p. 60). The latter number differs considerably from the 11 gibbon paintings attributed to Yi Yuanji (plus a few monkey paintings) that were seen during this study, that the historical losses of artworks must have been immense.

To judge by the highly diverse styles of these paintings, however, it seems questionable whether all paintings attributed to Yi Yuanji were made by the same artist. The effortless virtuosity with which the painter populates a landscape with rather naturalistically painted gibbons in Fig. 8 differs considerably from the ornamental construction of the gibbon family shown in Fig. 9. It should also be noted that attributions of paintings to artists were and still are a big problem in Chinese art history in general and in the Northern Song period in particular (Hesemann, 2006, p. 142f). As pointed out by Lovell (1981), it was a common occurrence in the history of Chinese painting that the name of the most famous artist working with a certain subject, theme or style became

synonymous with that subject, and the majority of subsequent works in the genre automatically acquired an attribution to the artist. “Very few authentic works by Yi Yuanji survive today but many a gibbon painting purports to be from his hand” (Lovell, 1981, p. 60). Furthermore, copying paintings of old masters was a common practice throughout much of China’s history (Unverzagt, 2005; Wong, 1962), which might also account for some of the stylistic diversity of paintings attributed to one artist (such as Yi Yuanji). If this interpretation is correct, some of the paintings may have been created slightly after (or even before) Yi Yuanji’s activity period. As a result, the first peak in the number of gibbon paintings/time would be flatter and less conspicuous than shown in Fig. 2.

The second peak in the number of gibbon paintings/time occurred in the period from 1200 to 1325. Although works by several artists are included in this peak, most of the paintings (69%) from that time are attributed to Muqi (c.1210-1325). Thumbnails of many of these gibbon paintings are shown in Gotoh Museum (1996). In some of these gibbons, the fur is painted to look thick and soft, in others, it has a more bristle appearance; some gibbons have prominent fluffy ears, others don’t, and some gibbons exhibit thick, furry limbs, whereas others have extremely lean and unrealistically long limbs (a feature that was developed only much later by Japanese gibbon painters). Although 31 paintings examined during this study are attributed to Muqi, their high stylistic diversity makes it unlikely that all of them were made by the same artist. If some of these paintings postdate Muqi, the second peak might exhibit a more bell-shaped form than shown in Fig. 2.

A gibbon painting that looks very much as if painted by Muqi is shown in Fig. 21. This painting was copied from an existing painting attributed to Muqi and is a well documented example of a painting that was made as a forgery. Zhang Daqian (1899-1983) painted it in the style of a Southern Song dynasty painting, in the style of the artists Liang Kai and Muqi (Fu and Stuart, 1991; von Spee, 2007). He even “aged” and intentionally wrinkled the paper to make it look old, and he asked the calligrapher and artist Pu Xin-yu (= Pu Ru, 1896-1963) to write some inscriptions and a poem (not shown in the figure). Zhang Daqian was not only a versatile and highly productive painter and collector-dealer, but probably the greatest Chinese painting forger of all time. His forgeries included some of the greatest names in all of Chinese painting and even anonymous Buddhist works (Whitfield, 1993).

Peaks one and two can be linked to the productive gibbon painting career of two famous Chinese artists. After the end of their career, no further artists became known for being specialised in painting gibbons until the 20th century, suggesting that the absence of peaks in the period from the 14th to 18th century is a real finding and not an artefact of either the sampling effort invested in this study or the differential preservation of paintings in certain time periods.

The most pronounced peak in the number of gibbon paintings/time, however, is the third one (Fig. 2). This sudden and huge increase in the production of gibbon paintings started early during the 20th century. Why did painting gibbons suddenly become so attractive?

One could argue that the art of the 20th century is simply better documented or preserved than that of earlier periods. However, the preservation probability or documentation quality of paintings should asymptotically approach zero the further one goes back in time. Abrupt changes in the number of paintings should not occur according to this hypothesis. The increased production of gibbon art must, therefore, have been influenced by other aspects (e.g. patronage of particular rulers, historical events, economy, etc.).

An alternative explanation could be that landscape painting appears to have lost some of its significance starting with the 18th century (but especially during the 20th century), whereas other genres such as figure and animal paintings became more dominant (Andrews, 1994; Blunden and Elvin, 1983, p. 173; Hesemann, 2006, p. 239; C. von Spee, pers. comm.). If this interpretation is correct, it would be compatible with the results of this study, but the original question “Why did gibbon paintings suddenly increase in dominance?”, would then need to be replaced with the question: “Why did figure and animal paintings suddenly increase in dominance?”.

As a third explanation, it is possible that a single influential painter like Zhang Daqian (1899-1983) may have “re-animated” gibbon painting (C. von Spee, pers. comm.). This artist had a special preference for painting gibbons (Fu and Stuart, 1991; von Spee, 2007). If this interpretation is correct, it would mean that Zhang Daqian had considerable influence on the artists of his time. In fact, more than 40 artists began to paint gibbons between 1900 und 1975. It is unclear, however, whether Zhang Daqian could have had such an influential role during the 50 years he spent in China. Born in 1899 in Sichuan, he was committed to an artistic career by the age of 20 and spent some time in Shanghai as an art student. His retreat from Peking with the Japanese invasion in 1937 led to life in Sichuan, interrupted by two and a half years at the frontier site of Dunhuang (1941-43). With the advent of the People’s Republic he left China in 1949, never to return (Edwards, 1992).

As shown in Fig. 48, not only the number of Chinese gibbon paintings but also the number of Chinese painters that specialized in gibbon paintings increased dramatically (and statistically significantly) during the 20th century. However, the occurrence of this peak in gibbon paintings is not the sole result of these specialists’ combined activity. Figure 49 also shows an equally dramatic increase in the number of non-specialists (i.e. painters who produced only one or two gibbon paintings each) which also contributed to the peak.

In any case, a relatively sudden increase in the dominance of gibbon paintings occurred during the 19th century. The reasons for this increase are not well understood and will require further study. The rise in gibbon paintings/time during the 20th century appears to coincide roughly with the Republic of China-period (1911-1949). It has been well documented that various artistic styles and techniques experienced rapid changes (and sometimes reversals) in acceptance during the 20th century in China, especially during the years between 1949 and 1979, when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) succeeded in eradicating most of those of which it disapproved (Andrews, 1990; 1994). The communist party put into effect a radical program of reform under the strict control of the party commissars, who decided what kind of art should be made and which artists would be permitted to work. In the early 1950s, the styles derived from traditional Chinese painting and from the École des Beaux-Arts were declared elitist and corrupt and would be replaced by Socialist Realism. A brief period of liberalisation during the Hundred Flower Movement in 1956 was followed by a brutal crackdown of intellectual critics of the regime under the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957. When Mao launched the Great Leap Forward in 1958, the mass collectivization of peasants into people's communes and the forced development of rural industrial production resulted in an economic catastrophe and an epic famine (Fong, 2001, p. 206). As economic disasters piled up and the national morale sagged, a revived interest and respect for the traditional art occurred in the early 1960s. It was nowhere more apparent than in painting where once again political content was abandoned.

By late 1963, Jiang Qing, the third wife of Mao Zedong, had begun to rise in power and to exert control over the arts. As the economy recovered from mistakes of the Great Leap Forward and the communist party recovered its shaken self-confidence, the lenience towards apolitical art began to disappear. In 1966, Mao unleashed the Cultural Revolution, a disastrous campaign to heighten the revolutionary goals of the Communist party (Fong, 2001, p. 206f). The Cultural Revolution policies of Jiang Qing and the other members of the Gang of Four completely dominated art, imbuing it with an unprecedented political saturation. Art for art's sake was condemned and only art that idealized the workers, peasants, and the military was sanctioned. It was characterized by "red" in both colour and content. Artists, writers and intellectuals were "purged", sent into the countryside or to prisons. By the end of 1966, rampaging Red Guards went on a massive campaign to destroy religious structures and institutions, destroy "counterrevolutionary" art and architecture, and burn ancient scrolls and books, thus obliterating a large part of China's cultural heritage (Anonymous, 2005). The Cultural Revolution ended in 1976 with the death of Mao Zedong and the arrest of the Gang of Four in the same year.

None of the cultural events and changes described above appears to explain how and why gibbon painting as a genre received such a formidable boost during this time period.

Another change that must have affected not only working conditions of artists but also their outlook on art itself occurred at the end of the Cold War in 1979, when the Chinese government formalized a new policy of openness to the West (Andrews, 1994). During the first 70 years of the 20th century, western art turned its back to realism and – with several experiments – passed the period of Modern Art. "At the end of the Cold War in the 1970s, when China opened itself to the world anew, […] Chinese artists were surprised to discover the extremely disharmonic relation between their art and the modern tendencies of the international art. As a result, realist painting, which had developed in China for nearly one century, lost its importance for the artists, especially those of the younger generation. Therefore, in 1979, at the beginning of the Contemporary Chinese art, we are still looking at a sinking culture, like at the beginning of the 20th century" (Li, 2005). One would expect that a new policy which initiated a re-orientation of artists and to the rise of the Contemporary Chinese art may also have initiated a decline of the gibbon painting genre. However, no such trend can be discerned from the data collected for this study (Fig. 2).

This study documents for the first time that the gibbon painting genre survived all political and social troubles and changes that occurred during the 20th century. Not only did the genre survive, it actually began to thrive during this period, possible more than ever before, and it appears to continue to thrive today. This is unexpected. Books that document the development of Chinese art during the last 50 years often focus on its strong ties to the political direction of communist China, and exhibitions of Contemporary Chinese art in the west tend to show art which exhibits at least a trace of protest against the political situation (Andrews, 1994; Fibicher and Frehner, 2005; Hesemann, 2006; Hyer and Billingsley, 2005). For instance "Revolutionary Realism", the dominant art style in the time period of 1949 to 1979, was foremost a political tool, and the political message of most paintings was clearly in the foreground (Hesemann, 2006, p. 242). In contrast, gibbon paintings show very little evidence of a political context. The use of red or vermillion accents mentioned above, for instance in the foliage of trees, is usually interpreted as a political statement, but its use was independent of gibbon art, and paintings with red trees became quite popular (e.g. Siu Fun-Kee, 2007). Of course, Chinese artists are famous throughout the centuries for hiding political or other messages in the form of subtle symbolic allusions and rebuses (e.g. Bai Qianshen, 1999), but if any political meanings are hidden in gibbon paintings of the 20th century, these meanings, like the gibbon paintings of that time period themselves, appear to have remained unstudied so far. Gibbon paintings represent an

essentially traditionalist genre. How and why it started to thrive during the 20th century and still continues to do so is unclear and deserves further study.

Japan

Japanese painting was influenced by Chinese painting while still pursuing its own path. This resulted in different results and developments than that found on the mainland and gives Japanese art in general, and Japanese gibbon art in particular, an interest all its own. A comparison of the gibbon paintings from China and Japan reveals that the historical development of the genre took a different course in the two countries.

In Japan, the earliest gibbon paintings found during this study date from the 14th century, which is again earlier than the 15th or 16th century reported in previous publications (Cunningham, 1991, p. 46; Van Gulik, 1968, p. 97). When discussing a Japanese gibbon painting, Woodson and Mellott (1994, p. 85) reported that "curious monkeys were closely observed and depicted in Chinese paintings as early as the thirteenth century, and in Japanese paintings in the fourteenth century". Unfortunately, these authors regarded and identified all primates as "monkeys" (even gibbons, which are not monkeys, but apes). This makes it impossible to decide whether the authors are referring to gibbons or monkeys in the sentence quoted above. Mislabelling "monkeys" as "gibbons" or "apes" and vice versa is not only extremely common in Western texts (e.g. English titles of paintings as shown in Figs. 31, 33, 37, 40, 41), but, unfortunately, occurs in Eastern texts as well.

Japanese gibbon paintings were produced until the first half of the 20th century, with a peak in the number of paintings at around the mid-Edo period (first half of the 18th century).

It is generally believed that the most influential gibbon painter for the development of Japanese gibbon art was the Chinese Zen monk Muqi (c.1210-1275). Muqi's works were brought back to Japan by Japanese Zen monks who had visited China (Woodson and Mellott, 1994) somewhere between the 13th century (Van Gulik, 1968, p. 97) and the 15th century (Cunningham, 1991, p. 46). Muqi's paintings had such a powerful impact on Japanese ink painting in general, and gibbon painting in particular, that the art of pivotal Japanese painters like Hasegawa Tohaku is virtually incomprehensible without taking it into account (Kuroda, 1996).

Zen Buddhism itself was formally established in Japan at the end of the 12th and the beginning of the 13th century (Brinker *et al.*, 1996, p. 12), or in the late 13th or early 14th century (Woodson and Mellott, 1994).

As mentioned above, the occurrence of, and preference for, gibbon paintings in Japan appears to be closely linked to the import of Chan (Japanese: Zen) Buddhism from China to Japan. This interpretation is supported by the observation that the majority of the Japanese gibbon paintings depict the theme of the "Gibbon reaching for the moon" or "Gibbon reaching for the reflection of the moon in the water", a favourite theme in Zen Buddhism both satirizing human folly (reaching into the water in a vain effort to capture the reflection of the moon served as an example of senseless greed and the desire to possess things that cannot be used) and symbolizing the search for enlightenment (Cunningham, 1991, p. 110; Woodson and Mellott, 1994, p. 85). In contrast, only few Chinese gibbon paintings are devoted to this theme (for instance two attributed to the Chan monk Muqi).

As speciality of Zen pictures, often only those elements are depicted which are relevant for understanding the theme of the painting. In many gibbon paintings, for instance, the gibbon is seen hanging from a branch, but the water and the reflection of the moon are not visible. In some cases, the gibbon is not even reaching down towards a potential water surface, but up towards the moon (which may or may not be visible in the painting). The viewer himself is supposed to supplement the picture by meditating about the topic of the painting and, by doing so, getting approaching enlightenment.

A fairly common variant of the theme of the "Gibbon reaching for the moon" in Japan depicts a gibbon chain. Suspended from one gibbon supported by a tree branch, numerous gibbons form a long chain, each clinging to the arm, hand or foot of another, the lowest of the group trying to reach for the reflection of the moon in the water. As correctly pointed out by Van Gulik (1967, p. 7), gibbons are not known to deliberately collaborate using this method for reaching from a high place an object down on the ground.

Gibbon holding, offering or gathering peaches are depicted only rarely (only one example was found during this study). This theme is more common in Chinese and Korean gibbon paintings. It alludes to Chinese legends about the fruit of immortality and the Daoist Queen Mother of the West.

Conspicuous large folding screens (*byobu*) and sliding doors (*fusuma*) depicting gibbons (Figs. 31, 32, 37) first appeared in the Muromachi period (1392-1573) and became more common during the Momoyama epoch (1573-1603) and well into early Edo period (1603-1868). Originating in China, the first screens used in Japan, from the seventh to the eighth century, came from China and Korea. Later, screens were made in Japan. The most common format is the pair of six-panel folding screens, each screen measuring about one and a half meters high and about three and a half meters wide. The use of a gold foil background for painted screens came into extensive use during the sixteenth century and covers the surface of some of the most magnificent screens (Klein and Wheelwright, 1984a, b; Yonemura, 1993).

In a famous gibbon screen by Hasegawa Tohaku (1539-1610), the use of gold helps to create a dream-like scene, as if taken from another, better world (Fig. 32). Screens were part of a uniquely Japanese expression of a monumental style that flourished during the Momoyama epoch (1573-1603) (Cunningham, 1991). During the Momoyama epoch, warlords built tall, fortified castles, with small windows. The owners decorated the larger wall areas of the dim interior spaces with sliding doors and folding screens painted with auspicious themes (Woodson and Mellot, 1994). As these large paintings served to impress rivals and allowed the owner to display his wealth and status, painters were forced to create a new, monumental style of art. The colour that these artists particularly favoured was gold, and compositions done in ink and rich pigments on gold-leaf backgrounds became the most characteristic works of Momoyama art. It has been hypothesized that this extremely free use of gold leaf, which had been known but seldom employed by artists of the Muromachi period, was partly dictated by the need for greater illumination in the dimly lit reception halls of Momoyama castles (Varley, 2000). The stability and prosperity of the Edo period (1603-1868) led to the emergence of new patrons from the merchant class. This situation encouraged artistic innovation and the continued creation of screens and other art embellished with gold and silver (Fig. 35).

In contrast to Chinese gibbon art, Japanese paintings often show gibbons as fluffy hairballs with big round heads and small faces. These infantile features, or "babyness" factors were referred to originally by Lorenz as the "*Kindchen-Schema*" (cited in Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1989). As another trend, many Japanese artists depict gibbons with impossibly long arms, especially during the Edo (1603-1868) and Meiji periods (1868-1912).

During the same periods, the theme of "the gibbon reaching for the reflection of the moon in the water" became so popular in Japan that all kinds of objects were decorated with this design (ranging from dishes, perfume boxes to swords).

The decline of gibbon painting as a genre in Japan probably was initiated by, and began soon after, the radical changes that occurred at the beginning of the Meiji period in 1868. At this time, the Tokugawa-Shogunate was abolished and replaced by the Meiji imperator, and Japan was opened to foreign citizens (Dunn, 2006a). Furthermore, this was "a time when Buddhism had suffered persecution after the radical change to the new Meiji regime" (Onishi, 1993). As Japanese gibbon paintings appear to be almost completely confined to Zen-Buddhistic contexts, the genre probably began to lose ground at the same time as Buddhism.

To judge by the absolute number of gibbon paintings, it would appear that Japan produced more gibbon paintings than China during the time period from the 17th to the 19th centuries. However, such a comparison makes sense only if the preservation of paintings were similar in both countries. Whether this assumption is valid is questionable.

Gibbons do not naturally occur in Japan, in contrast to their originally vast distribution in China (e.g. Geissmann, 1995; Groves, 1970). Although McShea Ewen (1998) reported that "The Japanese had a special fondness for gibbons, as they were native to Japan," this incorrect information probably results from a misquote of Woodson and Mellott (1994, p. 85): "The Japanese had a special fondness for monkeys, as they were native to Japan." As mentioned above, Woodson and Mellott erroneously regarded and identified all primates (including gibbons) as monkeys. It serves as a good example of how incorrect terminology, once created, continues to confuse later authors. As a result, every statement on "monkeys", "gibbons" or "apes" in Chinese, Japanese and Korean art should be regarded with caution. Often, the meaning of a text is unclear until one sees the paintings the author is referring to.

Korea

In contrast to Chinese and Japanese art, Korean art survives in much smaller quantities and has been less widely studied. Chinese, Mongol, Manchu, and Japanese armies have attacked and looted Korea at various times in the country's history. That so few historical records, artworks, or architectural monuments survived from before the late sixteenth century is largely a result of the destruction wrought by these incursions (Hammer and Smith, 2001).

Because of its geographical position, Korea frequently functioned as a conduit between China and Japan for ideas and beliefs, material culture and technologies (Dunn, 2006b; Hammer and Smith, 2001).

The numerous Buddhist pilgrims who travelled from Korea to China and India introduced types and styles of Buddhist images from China and India, enriched the iconographic repertoire and contributed to the common international style that characterized Buddhist sculptures of the Unified Silla dynasty (AD 668-935) and the Koryô dynasty (AD 918-1392). The Koryô court and aristocracy were the fervent patrons of Buddhist art (Cambon and Carroll, 2005, p. 182), and the majority of Korea's most important surviving art treasures were inspired by the practice of Buddhism (Hammer and Smith, 2001). Sôn is the Korean version of the meditative Chan Buddhism (Japanese: Zen), which developed in China between the sixth and seventh centuries. A form of Chan Buddhism was transmitted to Korea perhaps as early as the seventh century, reportedly by a Korean monk who studied in China. After the twelfth century, Sôn became the dominant form of Buddhist practice in Korea (Hammer and Smith, 2001).

During the early Yi dynasty (AD 1392-1910), Confucianism became the state philosophy (Cambon and Carroll, 2005; Dunn, 2006b). The Neo-Confucian

revolution experienced in the 16th century was broad and profound in its effects, and the results were devastating. The Korean version of Neo-Confucianism that became the dominant Yi ideology by the end of the 16th century was an inherently intolerant doctrine, and its followers were quick to reject and suppress other teachings, including Buddhism (Cambon and Carroll, 2005, p. 69).

Although Buddhism continued to be popular among commoners and in the countryside, with intermittent royal tolerance, it never again had the artistic pre-eminence that it once enjoyed, and the production of Buddhist-related works was openly discouraged (Cambon and Carroll, 2005, pp. 11, 182). Korean painting during the Yi period was more influenced by Chinese artists of the Southern Song (AD 1127-1279) academy tradition than those of contemporary Chinese scholar-painters.

Only few gibbon paintings from Korea were found during this study. Although this is difficult to quantify, it appears that gibbon (and monkey) paintings were always less common there than in China and Japan. Neither gibbons nor monkeys naturally occur in Korea. This, and the suppression of Buddhist-related art during the Yi dynasty (AD 1392-1910), may explain the apparent rarity of paintings of these animals in Korea, but conclusions drawn from this small sample must be regarded with caution.

The available Korean gibbon paintings rarely appear to exhibit a clear Buddhist context. The Buddhist parable of the gibbon reaching for the moon's reflection in the water, which is illustrated so often in Japanese gibbon paintings, does not occur in the Korean sample. Only one painting of the 19th century can be placed in a Buddhist context as it combines the gibbon or gibbon-like animal with a Buddhist monk. In contrast, several paintings depict gibbons holding or gathering peaches (Daoist symbols of longevity).

No gibbon paintings older than about 1550 were found during this study. This may be either due to the small sample size of Korean gibbon paintings, or because so few of the paintings before the fifteenth century survived (Hammer and Smith, 2001, p. 61). The growing popularity of both Sôn Buddhism and of Chinese paintings from the Southern Song era influenced the art production in Korea during the Yi dynasty (1392-1910) (Hammer and Smith, 2001). Both developments may have been factors in the introduction of the gibbon painting genre to the country.

Korean artists were probably inspired by Chinese paintings of these animals, and most appear to have been unfamiliar with the animals themselves. Many of the painted gibbons exhibit facial expressions, short tails, body proportions, or positional behaviour that do not occur in real gibbons, suggesting that many Korean artists had less access to the classical Chinese gibbon paintings than Japanese artists. For instance, one painting by Yun Duseo (1668-1718) shows a gibbon hanging from a branch, but not suspended by its hands, but by its axilla (Fig. 45). This awkward position is not known to be adopted by living gibbons. It is unclear when depicting gibbons in this position was invented, but gibbons in similar positions were painted by Chinese artists such as Hua Yan (1682-1756), Zhang Shanzi (1882-1940), Zhang Daqian (1899-1983), Mu Lingfei (1913-1997), and Tian Shiguang (1916-1999), as well as Japanese artists such as Kano Koi (c.1569-1636).

During Japanese domination (1910-1945), Korea was not only modernised, but Korean traditional painting was excluded from academic studies, Western art and art education was introduced into society, and Korean artists were indoctrinated in Japanese-style painting (Ahn Hwi-joon, 1994). These difficult times for Korean painting may also have had a damaging impact on gibbon painting. The most recent Korean gibbon painting found during this study dates from 1940, suggesting that the genre may have lost some or most of its already moderate relevance in modern Korea.

Dating of Events

As shown above, gibbon paintings in both China and Japan are older than assumed in previous publications. Similar dating problems occur in paleontological studies, which often date the origin of an extinct group of organisms based on the earliest preserved fossil representant of that group. Although paleontology appears to be only distantly related to cultural history, specialists of both disciplines have to deal with quite similar problems. Gaps in the preservation of cultural relicts and gaps in the fossil record pose similar scientific challenges to the evaluation of the data. Therefore, scientists working in one of the two disciplines may benefit from the methodology of the other. As discussed by Martin (1993), direct dating of phylogenetic origins is confronted with two problems: (1) If a group is documented by few fossils only, the oldest fossil representant of this group is with a high probability considerably younger than the real origin of its group. (2) Trends in the fossil representation can produce additional errors. The same rationale applies to direct dating of the origin for cultural products. (i) If only few items of product are preserved, the oldest preserved item is with a high probability considerably younger than the real origin of this type of product. (ii) Trends in the preservation can produce additional errors. As a result, direct datings tend to produce origins that are considerably too young, especially when a high percentage of the material to be dated has not been preserved.

It is known that Chinese painting flourished as early as the Zhou period (11th ct. BC - 221 BC) and that emperors of the Han dynasty (206 BC - AD 220) who were connoisseurs of art owned picture collections (Cohn, 1942). Yet, because paintings on silk or paper get destroyed easily, complete or partial destruction of both large imperial and private collections with thousands or tenthousands of paintings due to fire and water occurred periodically

(Unverzagt, 2005). As a result, relatively few paintings predating the Song period (960-1279) are preserved today, giving us only a vague idea of the painting of the early periods (Münsterberg, 1968; Pope *et al.*, 1961-1962; Unverzagt, 2005). In the numerous invasions, changes of dynasties and revolts the palaces of the great with their priceless contents were the first victims of destruction (Cohn, 1942). Similar losses also characterize the history of Korean art and, possibly to a lesser degree, Japanese art (Hammer and Smith, 2001; Münsterberg, 1968; Priest, 1958; K. Epprecht, pers. comm.), suggesting that the origin of gibbon paintings as a genre may have a much earlier date, at least in China and Korea, than suggested by the earliest gibbon paintings found during this study.

This hypothesis is also supported by the observation that objects decorated with gibbon designs or sculpted in gibbon-shapes are known from periods as early as the late Eastern Zhou period (4th-3rd century BC). They predate the oldest recorded gibbon painting (9th century) by more than a thousand years. Because many of these objects are made of metal, they are less easily destroyed than paintings on silk or paper.

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In spite of my diligent research, copyright holders of a few paintings could not be located. If you claim credit for a painting that has appeared in this publication then I will be happy to know about it so that I can make the appropriate acknowledgement.

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Zusammenfassung

Gibbonbilder in China, Japan, and Korea: geschichtliche Verbreitung, Produktionshäufigkeit und Entstehungskontext

Gibbons, die kleinen Menschenaffen der Familie Hylobatidae, belegten und belegen eine wichtige Nische in der chinesischen Kultur, und für lange Zeit taten sie das auch in der japanischen und koreanischen Kultur. Dies manifestiert sich unter anderem in der häufigen Darstellung dieser Tiere in den bildenden Künsten. Dies ist die erste Studie, in der die Produktion von Gibbonbildern dieser Länder in verschiedenen geschichtlichen Zeitabschnitten mengenmässig erfasst und verglichen wird. Insgesamt wurden 818 Gibbonbilder erfasst. Die Untersuchung zeigt, dass die frühesten Gibbonbilder deutlich älter sind als in einigen früheren Veröffentlichungen angegeben. Dies gilt sowohl für China (vor der Song-Dynastie) als auch für Japan (vor der Momoyama-Periode). Zusätzlich sorgen die kleinen Stichprobenzahlen früher asiatischer Gemälde dafür, dass das Genre der Gibbonbilder in jedem der untersuchten Länder ein noch deutlich früheres Entstehungsdatum gehabt haben dürfte, als es durch die frühesten in dieser Studie gefundenen Bilder angezeigt wird.

Usprünglich entwickelte sich das Genre in China, breitete sich dann aber auch in die Nachbarländer Japan und Korea aus, obwohl dort Gibbons nie heimisch waren und die Künstler daher wenig eigene Kenntnisse von den dargestellten Menschenaffen hatten. In China wurden Gibbons in ganz verschiedenen Kontexten und Funktionen dargestellt. Dazu gehören unter anderem Vorstellungen von Gibbons als Bindeglieder zwischen Mensch und Natur, als Wesen, die fähig sind, menschliche Gestalt anzunehmen oder hunderte von Jahren alt zu werden, und als sinnbildliche Träger erstrebenswerter menschlicher Attribute. Gibbons werden dargestellt als in Bilderrätsel (Rebus) eingekleidete Glückwünsche zum Bestehen von Prüfungen oder Wünsche für hohe Amtspositionen, als ursprünglich daoistisches Konzept eines Überbringers von Früchten, deren Genuss Langlebigkeit verheisst, oder in der buddhistische Parabel vom "Greifen nach dem Spiegelbild des Mondes" als Sinnbild von menschlichem Streben nach dem Unmöglichen oder Sinnlosen. In Japan wurde des Genre der Gibbonmalerei von Zen-Buddhisten eingeführt, und von Anfang an ist die überwiegende Mehrzahl der Gibbonbilder in Japan dem buddhistischen Motiv "Greifen nach dem

Spiegelbild des Mondes" gewidmet. Stilistisch jedoch haben sich die chinesischen und japanischen Gibbonbilder sehr schnell voneinander entfernt.

In den koreanischen Gibbonbildern fehlt das Motiv vom "Greifen nach dem Spiegelbild des Mondes", aber die geringe Grösse der koreanischen Stichprobe lässt wenig verallgemeinernde Aussagen zu.

Die Herstellungshäufigkeit von Gibbonbildern pro Zeiteinheit weist starke, bisher nicht dokumentierte Schwankungen auf. Im Zeitraum von 1525 bis 1900, als Gibbonbilder in China zwar regelmässig, aber nicht häufig gemalt wurden, war die Beliebtheit des Genres in Japan (gemessen an der Zahl der erhaltenen Bilder) sogar konsistent höher als im Ursprungsland der Gibbonbilder.

Der dramatischste Anstieg der Produktionsrate erfolgte jedoch in China während des 20. Jahrhunderts. Während das Genre der Gibbonbilder zu diesem Zeitpunkt in Japan (und vermutlich in Korea) am Erlöschen war, erlebte China einen bisher nicht belegten und anscheinend in dieser Grössenordnung erstmaligen Anstieg sowohl in der Zahl der Künstler, welche solche Bilder malten, als auch in der hohen Zahl solcher Gibbonbilder, die von einigen Spezialisten unter diesen Künstlern hergestellt wurden. Die Ursachen für diese Veränderungen sind noch unerforscht, aber einige mögliche Gründe werden hier diskutiert. Schliesslich dokumentiert diese Studie auch Änderungen im Stil und im Kontext der Gibbondarstellungen, die in verschiedenen historischen Zeitabschnitten auftraten, und diskutiert auch für diese die mögliche Ursachen.