Sino-Anglo-Euro Wolf Fan(g)s from Jiang Rong to Annaud

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Abstract

Fans of Jiang Rong's *Wolf Totem* could arguably shapeshift into a wolf's fangs, the sharp tips of China's Social Darwinism today. Jiang mourns the killing of Mongolian wolves, erecting a literary totem there after wolves are gone. An elegy for the wild comes to justify the growing of fangs amid the jungle of the socialist-capitalist market. Wolf totem becomes a phallic symbol for power. A Sino-Anglo-Euro morphing materializes in global cinema as Annaud transforms the novel into *The Last Wolf.* Annaud's romantic film downplays Jiang's nationalistic tenor, avoiding to bare "red [in] tooth and claw" to the world.

Keywords: Jiang Rong, Wolf Totem, Jean-Jacques Annaud.

Resumen

Los fans de Wolf Totem de Jiang Rong podrían discutiblemente transformarse en los colmillos de un lobo, las afiladas puntas del darwinismo social en China hoy en día. Jiang lamenta la muerte de los lobos mongoles, erigiendo un tótem literario allí tras la marcha de los lobos. Una elegía a los salvaje llega a justificar el crecimiento de colmillos en medio de la jungla del mercado socialista-capitalista. El tótem del lobo se convierte en un símbolo fálico de poder. Un Changling sino-anglo-europeo de algún tipo se materializa en el cine global cuando Annaud transforma la novela en El último lobo. La romántica película de Annaud resta importancia al tono nacionalista de Jiang, evitando mostrar "rojo [en] diente y garra" al mundo.

Palabras clave: Jiang Rong, Wolf Totem, Jean-Jacques Annaud.

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Introduction: Asian and Anglo-European Contexts

To a non-native speaker of English like myself, pronouncing the difference between "n" versus "ng" word endings, such as in a present participle or a gerund, is nerve-wracking. This lifelong source of anxiety on my part leads to the pun of Chinese fans of, or Chinese fangs bared by, Jiang Rong's *Wolf Totem* (2004). Apparently, fans imagining self-empowerment via totemic idols are not limited to the Chinese. From a transnational perspective, wolf fans from admirers of Jack London's *The Call of the Wild* (1903) to global followers of Jiang Rong's novel—courtesy of Howard Goldblatt's 2008 translation-cum-retelling in English—and finally to Jean-Jacques Annaud's 2015 film adaptation are conceivably drawn to the potency symbolized by a wolf's fangs, namely, the sharp tips of Euro-American Darwinian Naturalism a century ago or China's Social Darwinism today. A wolf fan is one who wishes to empower oneself with wolf-like fangs, a fitting description of

the millennial China which has, echoing Mao's prophetic words in 1949, "stood up" on the world stage. The secret to this transformation between fans and fangs lies in fiction's play of absence and presence, akin to the unseen fluttering of the tongue up or down inside the mouth to "g" or not to "g." Specifically, while the protagonist Buck in Jack London is a dog restored by necessity to his wolf instinct, he is expressly not a wolf, without the species' long fangs and other biological attributes. Likewise, *Wolf Totem* mourns the killing of wolves in Mongolian grasslands, erecting a literary totem there after wolves are gone, despite the fact that such a "primitive" cultural totem has never existed there physically, historically.[1] The presence of a wolf totem is predicated not only on the absence of wolves but also on that of totems. Jiang's muddled thinking is so intuitive and self-serving that it preempts any further reflection. Put simply, in the name of an elegy for the wild, Jiang's fans justify the growing of fangs to survive the jungle of the socialist-capitalist market, a mongrelized Social Darwinism that cross-breeds Mao's class struggle and revolutionary puritanism with free-market natural selection and individual greed. Wolf totem becomes a phallic symbol for masculinity and supremacy, the Golden Calf adored not only by the Chinese but also by the world market.

Morphing, whether between "n" and "ng" endings or other forms, is inherent in the definition of totem, and that of wolf in particular. Despite its problematic formulation, Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1919) has long linked "savages and neurotics," the former worshipping ancestral spirits in animal totems and the latter fixated on certain psychic schematics. The father of psychoanalysis borrows from anthropology to elucidate the human unconscious. Likewise, Jiang conjures up the phantasm of nomadic "savages" and their wolves to fan a national, Sino-centric neurosis. In reaction to the fin-de-siècle history of the East Asia Sick Man wasted away by opium, Jiang showcases what turns out to be the millennial East Asia Sick Wolf, whose complex stems from the shame and self-pity of having been a sheep under colonialism, gradually hardening into the aggressiveness and ethnocentrism of a global wolf, a fanged China. Shared by both Freud and Jiang—as well as other wolf representations in between in the century-long span across West and East, the totem serves as a receding metaphor, substituting for the missing source of awe. It is simultaneously awe-inspiring spirituality and awful, terrifying unknown in accordance with Edmund Burke's sense of the sublime.[2] The "original" of the alleged Mongolian totem to Jiang and his Chinese fans is the 12th- and 13th-century historical figure Genghis Khan. Khan ruled China and a wide swath of land across Central Asia and Eastern Europe, so much so that the West

[1] When Jean-Jacques Annaud's film *Wolf Totem* came out in 2015, an ethnic Mongolian writer Guo Xuebo claims that the "movie, released at Lunar New Year and showing folk traditions, rituals and lives of the ethnic Mongolian nomads and their bond with wolves, distorts the truth." See Laura Zhou's "Wolf Totem: writer blasts hit film over 'fake' Mongolian culture" in *South China Morning Post* on February 24, 2015.

[2] See Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, particularly Chapter 7, "On the Sublime."

called Mongolian horsemen the yellow peril, which continues to disturb the West's (un)conscious to this day. Like a Freudian fetish, a totem always means something else, thus pointing away from its physical existence: it is and it is not what it is. This is especially true with the wolf totem.

The liberty of deploying the wolf as a ploy goes back to the two pillars (totems?) of twentieth-century thought: Freud and Darwin. Freud's famous case of the wolfman in "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis" sees the wolf as the symbol of the primal scene and sexual trauma plaguing his patient, specifically, his childhood trauma of having witnessed his parents copulating in the doggie style, having been scared, and possibly fondled by his older sister. The most revealing part of Freud's analysis is that the wolfman's dream vision looms large like a tall totem: "*Suddenly the window opens of its own accord and terrified, I see that there are a number of white wolves sitting in the big walnut tree outside the window. There were six or seven of them. The wolves were white all over and looked more like foxes or sheepdogs because they had big tails like foxes and their ears were pricked up like dogs watching something. Obviously fearful that the wolves were going to gobble me up I screamed* and woke up" (227; italics in the original). In his ingenious speculation on the linkages between the wolfman's recurring nightmare and his early childhood sexual experiences, Freud fails to theorize fully the association among various animals: white wolves, foxes with bushy tails, sheepdogs with pricked-up ears, and the dreaming human. The fluidity of wolf, fox, dog, and ultimately human comes across as a psychic displacement to accommodate the source of dread—the wolf—as less intimidating animals: fox, even tamed sheepdog. The dream vision's wolf keeps morphing, owing in no small measure to the wolf's genetic ties to canines and, indirectly, to humans. Graphically, the dream vision of wolves sitting around a "big walnut tree" comprises a wolf totem, menacing the wolfman through the erect posture of the tree and the wolves, a thinly-veiled phallic symbol. The wolf becomes Freud's epigrammatic placeholder for power. Himself standing tall as the alpha male reigning over human dreams, Freud bears a striking resemblance to Darwin, the alpha male over human evolution.

Regarding the process of "Natural Selection, or the Survival of the Fittest" (51) in *On the Origin of Species* (1859), Darwin expounds by moving back and forth between wolf and dog. In a lean year, Darwin notes that "the swiftest and slimmest wolves have the best chance of surviving," which is followed in the same breath by the affirmation that: "man should be able to improve the fleetness of his greyhounds by careful and methodical selection" (58). What nature accomplishes through natural selection, humans can duplicate, Darwin counsels, through scientific intervention. From greyhounds, Darwin's train of thought instantly switches back to "two varieties of the wolf inhabiting the Catskill Mountains" (58). Darwin illustrates the gradual evolution of species while jumping abruptly to wolf, man, and dog in the same paragraph. The logical leap and lack of transition can only be explained by a Darwinian mental spectrum that runs from the wild wolves

to domesticated greyhounds to greyhounds' owners. A syllogism of sorts emerges and culminates in human centrality, as humans have control over tamed canines as well as theoretical mastery over the behavior of untamed ones.

Masters as they are in their respective fields, both Freud and Darwin fall victim to the expediency of wolf symbolism for the uncontrollable wild in wilderness as well as in the human unconscious. S. K. Robisch contends in *Wolves and the Wolf Myth in American Literature* (2009) that the conceptual duality of the real and virtual wolf runs through literature. The wolf's corporeality is inextricably bound up with mythology. Robisch calls the latter "ghost wolf," which "wrestled with the real wolf for dominance of our American thoughts" (3). The term *ghost* is used for two reasons: "The first is the overwhelming presence in human culture of myth and its totemic, ethereal, unconscious, and symbolic images, including the unidentifiable presence of imaginary animals in our mythologies; the second is the effort in both Europe and America to eradicate the wild from the face of the earth, leaving its revenant shade in its former regions" (17). Robisch's terms "ghost wolf" and "totemic" serendipitously resonate with Jiang's title, with one key difference. Robisch's word choice ensures an interweaving of the physical wolf and abstract human cognition, whereas Jiang's title anchors his novel positivistically, literally, almost experientially. In fact, Robisch argues, "the totality of the wolf (corporeal and ghostly, mimetic and imaginary, persona and shadow), the World-Wolf could be a mere buoy of corporeal glimmering in an apparitional sea" (19). Absent such scholarly subtlety as Robisch's parenthetical binarism, Jiang turns the "apparitional sea" upside down to flood the Chinese social fabric with a reactionary yearning for wolfishness. Yet Jiang's un-self-consciously metaphorical wolf remains motivated to some extent by Jack London's smorgasbord of a wolf. "In *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*," Robisch argues, "London attempted to synthesize no less than Darwinism, atavism, early Marxist socialism, the Nietzschean concept of the over-man, and the tricky relationship between deterministic naturalism and survivalist self-reliance" (290).[3] To fashion his wolf image, Jiang draws from equally disparate sources, not just Western ones like London but Chinese ones as well.

Akin to Jiang's backward-looking nostalgia for Mongolian wolves from a modernizing China, London's catch-all fantasy of the wolf also rebels against scientific progress, particularly the taxonomy of eighteenth century English dog-breeding, which coincided with the development of the discourse on race. The more stratified human races and dog species become, the more London muses on what lies beyond regulated society and knowledge. In "Foxhounds, Curs, and the Dawn of Breeding," Martin Wallen posits that "language governed by race, breed, and species becomes the very essence of the discourse on nature: to speak and write about animals—whether wild or domestic—means to institute and enforce

[3] In "In Wilderness is the Preservation of China," J. Gerard Dollar labels Jiang Rong's novel as "'neo-naturalistic,' a Chinese novel in the spirit of Jack London" (412).

these organized differences, and to speak and write about nature meaningfully can only be done taxonomically" (131). Given the proximity of discourses on race and on dog species, Wallen sees that "[d]ogs and humans. . . are the same, in that they share common interior sentiment, evident in the differences they each manifest within their own species" (133). Pitting his work against scientific taxonomy, Jack London makes a dog revert back to its wolf ancestry, a fallacy at the heart of mythical regression from men to werewolves.

American popular culture is replete with such tales of metamorphosis to assuage the urge for residual, repressed religiosity in an increasingly secular, technologized age.[4] As science and technology come to dominate human life, we escape into magical, supernatural transformation, vampires and werewolves being the most prominent duets. The undying Count Dracula has a running mate in the werewolf, multiplying in *The American Werewolf in London* (1981), *The Wolf* (1994), *The American Werewolf in Paris* (1997), *The Wolfman* (2010), *The Twilight Saga* (2009-2012), *Underworld* series (2006-2012), and many more. Note that in recent reincarnations, both vampires and werewolves populate the *Twilight* and *Underworld* franchises, as if to double animal magnetism in a market saturated with and inured to blood and gore. In both cases, the taboo of biological copulation is rendered in more acceptable, "filmable" oral contacts: vampires' love bites or wolf bites that pass on animality to the bitten, the smitten. These films follow the well-trodden path of siring werewolves by wolf bites at full moon. Likewise, Jiang's wolf bites are poisonous, requiring immediate penicillin shots, possibly to prevent rabies or some mysterious gangrene from setting in.

The fright over wolf bites coexists with the flight of fancy of becoming one with the wolf. Just as the Western compulsion rekindles itself in the old flame of wolf, or bat, for that matter, the East is also drawn to the alpha wolf of Genghis Khan. Inoue Yasushi's historical novel *The Blue Wolf* (1960) purports to chronicle, as the subtitle goes, *the Life of Chinggis Khan*, a subtitle that does not exist in the Japanese original. But in the long list of Dramatis Personae of historical figures at the end of the novel, only one fictitious character exists, conspicuous for the "(f)" notation at the end of his name: Bültechü Ba'atur. Not only does Inoue go to great lengths to bring in a story-teller, a bard, to sing of the mythic genesis of Mongolians via the mating of a wolf and a doe, but the "historical" novelist takes pains to construct a thoroughly foreign-sounding name with two umlauts. Bültechü Ba'atur's genesis story "told of a great lake far to the west and a rampaging wolf

[4] Hermann Hesse's *Steppenwolf* (1929) suggests the lineage from European to American cultures. Hesse's protagonist resembles a "wolf of the Steppes that had lost its way and strayed into the towns and the life of the herd" (18). The steppes would take the figurative "werewolf" (62) all the way across Central Asia to the Orient. But it is a mere Orientalist gesture to increase the polarity within the protagonist, a device to sharpen the contrast of "God and the Devil" within Christianity, goodness and the temptation of evil: "There is God and the devil in them; the mother's blood and the father's; the capacity for happiness and the capacity for suffering; and in just such a state of enmity and entanglement were the wolf and man in Harry" (48). The wolf is, needless to say, a figure of speech.

that crossed it at the orders of its deity and took the graceful, beautiful doe as its mate" (Inoue 10). Temüjin, Genghis Khan's pre-Khan name, is unsure of his origin because his mother Ő'elün had been abducted and raped by a rival tribe, the Merkid. To prove his Mongolian blood, Temüjin is resolved to demonstrate through action that he is a predatory wolf. The same doubt also haunts Temüjin's first-born Jochi, meaning "guest," because Temüjin's wife Bőrte is also abducted and raped: "Temüjin stared at the face of the infant lying beside Bőrte in bed. Just as he tormented himself over whether or not Mongol blood flowed in his own veins, this child would in future bear such doubts. And just as he would have to prove that there was Mongol blood in his body by becoming a wolf, so too would Jochi have to become a wolf" (Inoue 74). The Mongols are presented as a hybrid group determined by wolf-like action rather than by bloodline alone. The Japanese take on Genghis Khan is eerily close to that of contemporary Chinese wolf fans: fate is in the hands of those who resolve to grow a wolf's fangs.

This "historical" lesson is pushed to the extreme of Russian Orientalism in Sergey Bodrov's *Mongol* (2007). In *Mongol*, a Japanese actor plays Genghis Khan and a Chinese actor plays his Mongolian sworn brother turned enemy, chock full of action and fairy-tale happenings. The child Temüjin flees from enslavement as he prays to Tengger (Tengri for Sky-Father in Turkic-Mongolian animism) for help, whereupon his wooden cangue falls off, but not before a wolf, Tengger's avatar, peeks through a mountain shrine in slow-motion at the kneeling Temüjin. Akin to Robisch's ghost wolf, Bodrov gives us God-Wolf. But not all Asian texts idolize, totemize, and mythologize wolves. Hamid Sardar's documentary *Balapan: The Wings of the Altai* (2005) portrays Mongolia's Kazaks raising hawks to hunt wolves. Hence, wolf totemism, if it ever existed, is not widespread throughout the Mongolian plateau. Truth be told, Jiang's setting of Olonbulag lies to the west of China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, separate from the nation of Mongolia since 1924. Blurring the national borders and ethnic psyches is only the beginning of Jiang's and the Chinese fallacy of lupine transfiguration.

Such Japan-, Russia-, and China-made "Mongolian" kinship to wolves contravenes the Chinese phobia of wolves, if not in Japan and Russia as well. As early as the thirteenth-century, Wang Jiusi's play "Wolf of Mount Zhong" already capitalizes on the perception of the evil wolf: "Human beings are sly, / treacherous and cunning, / for all their human-looking faces, / And their hearts are the image of this wild wolf's" (102). In modern times, Jiang alludes several times to the wolf imagery used by the father of modern Chinese literature Lu Xun. Like any idol subject to exploitation, Jiang attributes to Lu Xun such canine tropes of wild versus tamed as the following: "Westerners are brutish, while we Chinese are domesticated" (Jiang 173). Quite on the contrary, a recurring motif in Lu Xun's short stories is the cannibalistic Chinese tradition. Far from a land inhabited by the "domesticated," Lu Xun's China is a Darwinian "man-eat-man" world, recast in the wolf stereotypes. "A Madman's Story" deals with a half-crazed narrator raving about cannibalism in his home village called "Wolf Cub Village," where a man was

beaten to death, "his heart and liver" taken out and "fried… in oil" and eaten (9). Endocannibalism is practiced figuratively not only by the villagers named after wolf cubs but by his own older brother and family, suspected of consuming the narrator's young sibling (17). "New Year's Sacrifice" details a traditional Chinese woman being devoured by patriarchal oppression. The nameless protagonist, Xianglin's Wife, loses her son to wolves that symbolize human greed and bestiality. Like the Ancient Mariner, Xianglin's Wife repeats her tale so frequently that, upon hearing her story ("there he was, lying in the wolf's lair, with all his entrails eaten away, his hand still tightly clutching that small basket"), listeners preempt her in mockery (139). While her son is eaten alive, her listeners are far more cruel and ravenous in taunting the memory of the child, who clutched even in death the basket his mother entrusted to him. A comi-tragic turn takes place in "The True Story of Ah Q" when the scapegoat for failed revolutions, the protagonist Ah Q, is paraded through the streets all the way to the execution ground. It suddenly dawns on Ah Q that the shouting crowd reminds him of "a hungry wolf" he met before: "He had never forgotten that wolf's eyes, fierce yet cowardly, gleaming like two will-o'-the-wisps… Now he saw eyes more terrible even than the wolf's: dull yet penetrating eyes that, having devoured his words, still seemed eager to devour something beyond his flesh and blood" (111-12). The sole lucid moment in his pathetic life arrives with the realization that he is a mere sacrificial lamb to his wolfish compatriots. Contrary to Lu Xun's biting satire against animalistic Chinese, Jiang portrays Chinese as sheep in need of a wolf-like appetite.[5] Jiang's revisionism stems from the iconoclastic communist ideology pitting the long-suffering peasants and working class against China's feudal past and elite, and foreign imperial powers. Chinese communist victimology lays the foundation for self-aggrandizement in the name of revenge. Into such a complex cultural milieu enters Jiang Rong.

Jiang Rong

Based on his eleven year exile to Inner Mongolia during the Cultural Revolution, Jiang Rong wrote the best-selling *Wolf Totem* to mourn the loss of Mongolian wolves and their habitat, and the lack of wolfishness within Chinese psyche. Published in 2004, nearly three decades after the Cultural Revolution, *Wolf Totem* was an instant hit in China. Its success stems not so much from Chinese nostalgia for wolves or grievances of the Cultural Revolution; rather, the distance of time and location allows Chinese to de-politicize *ressentiment* against Beijing under Mao as well as post-Mao and to displace their sentiments onto a remote, mythic animal fable. Empathy for the demise of Mongolian wolves—put simply, for

[5] This dichotomy of wolves and sheep is common in "recent Chinese writings," according to Chengzhou He in "Poetic Wolves and Environmental Imagination." Many Chinese writers, such as Jia Pingwa's *Huainian lang* (*Remembering the wolves*), portray wolves in an unusually positive and appreciating manner" (398).

the losing of their fangs—forms a victimology for fans who feel threatened and oppressed in the Social Darwinism of the post-Mao capitalist market, who wish to transform themselves from underdogs to top wolves. Indeed, what better way to justify ruthlessness than a victim's sense of vengeance? Confronted with the widening gap between the haves (capitalist wolves) and have-nots (sheep), totem worshippers identify with wild wolves that lost to modern wolves, believing that "the call of the wild" would revitalize them. In the hunt for superlatives, from Maoist self-righteous propaganda to communist-capitalist nouveaux riches, *Wolf Totem* is the new Little Red Book, eerily doubling back to Mao's maxim that "A revolution is not a dinner party… A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another." Except today's revolution plots Western-style modernization and the dinner party serves endocannibalistic fare.

Historically, under the pretext of learning from peasants and the proletariat, Chairman Mao dispatched masses of urban youths and intellectuals to China's backwaters and borderlands during the Cultural Revolution. These potential independent thinkers and dissidents against the Great Leader and his "Gang of Four" were herded like sheep, their youth devoured by the rapacious State. One such young man, Jiang Rong, turns his exile into a requiem for the decimated Inner Mongolian grassland and its wolves. A psychic displacement motivates such a narrative. To cope with the injustice, the wasted youth, and the lingering grief of having been sent en masse to the countryside to be "reeducated" by the preliterate and the not-so-literate, Jiang and his urban fans turn the decade-long disaster under Mao into the fruitful, enriching experience of learning about the Mongolian prairie. The personal and cultural negative is re-tuned as a lifelong positive.[6] Jiang is not alone in such imaginary revisionism of the Cultural Revolution. Dai Sijie's semi-autobiographical fiction and film *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* (2000, 2002) also romanticize those years spent in the remote mountains of the southwest not only through the stereotypical ingénue of a Chinese seamstress but also through symbols of Western high culture, including the French writer, violin, and Western classical music.

Jiang's semi-autobiographical novel has contributed to contemporary Chinese frenzy in promoting "*langxing*" (wolf nature) as a way of thinking and behaving. The novel centers on two Beijing youths sent down to Inner Mongolia: Chen Zhen who is so mesmerized by wolves that he raids a wolf den for a cub, Little Wolf, to raise himself; and Yang Ke who falls in love with Mongolian swans. Chen finds his inspiration in Jack London's stories and Yang in Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*. In addition to Western masters, Chen and Yang learn from the Mongolian

[6] J. Gerard Dollar asserts that the exile is "a radical dislocation from Beijing, an exile so extreme that it leads to the death of an old self and the fashioning of a new pilgrim self . . . an important part of each pilgrimage is the attempt to find and recover the wild" (417). However, Joan Chen's film *Xiu Xiu:The Sent Down Girl* (1998) presents an urban woman willing to give up her body repeatedly to obtain official approval to return to the city, alas, to no avail. Chen's bleak portrayal of a corrupt and woman-eating Maoist China accounts for the film's total ban in China.

wise man "Papa" Bilgee. Bilgee's family consists of three generations: his son Batu and his feisty daughter-in-law Gasmai have a son Bayar. In this "swan song" to a land subject to irreversible desertification, Jiang gives us few antagonists, other than the constant complaint of Chinese sheepishness and, paradoxically, Sinic wolves. These wolves are in human skin, in the form of Han-influenced ethnic and Han (the majority ethnic group similar to white Caucasians in the U.S. and in Europe) settlers from the eastern part of Inner Mongolia led by the Mongolian-turned-communist-leader Bao (his Chinese surname denoting a Sinophile more Chinese than the Chinese). Despite his Mongolian origin, Bao points with his riding crop, which only the Khan or tribal leaders would do (88). He even proposes scorching the grassland, a sacrilege no traditional Mongolian would ever contemplate (205). Bao's settlers decimate the land and its inhabitants—wild animals, livestock, and Mongolian nomads—bent upon remaking the grassland into farming communities, forcing a settler economy onto the nomads. A dramatis personae would not be complete without the nonhuman actors: Chen's Little Wolf and the Bilgee family dogs: Erlang, Bar ("Tiger" in Mongolian), Yellow, and Yir. Finally, following animist belief, Bilgee and Chen appeal to Tengger as an omnipotent God.

The double entendre of fan and fang points to Jiang's inherent fuzzy thinking and self-deception. The Han Beijing student Chen Zhen learns from Papa Bilgee about Mongolian grassland and its wolf soul. Revered as the alpha male who would scare off the wolf pack, Bilgee, along with his nomadic balance with nature, gradually gives way to a new alpha male, Bao, who brings about an anthropocentric annihilation of nature. While Jiang uses this change to rail against Han Chinese sheepish passivity, it contradicts the aggressiveness of sinologized and Han farmers in the novel.[7] The novel, perhaps unbeknownst to itself and to its millions of fans, epitomizes the Han majority as the new wolf destroying the old wolf of ethnic Mongolians. One group of carnivores with rifles, explosives, and jeeps simply wipes out the other with fangs and muscles. Yet in the hope of engendering aggressiveness, Jiang represents the Han Chinese culture as docile, blithely oblivious to the discrepancy between textual evidence and its intended message, between the novel's land-grabbing, plundering sinologized Mongolians and Han settlers driven by Beijing policies, on the one hand, and, on the other, China's hypothetical inaction. Jiang gives a new meaning to passive-aggressive in a make-believe China that pities itself as the prey of history, one supposedly apprenticed to the predatory mindset of Mongolians such as Bilgee. Yet Bilgee's way of life has already been eroded by China!

Jiang's twisted, expedient logic replays in the textual refrain of Chinese sheep, first by the Mongolian wise man Bilgee in educating Chen as to the ways of the grassland, subsequently by Chen himself in didactic preaching to his

[7] Chengzhou He in "The Wolf Myth and Chinese Environmental Sentimentalism in Wolf Totem" describes these "new arrivals" as "most of them Han Chinese" (787).

companion and sidekick Yang. Because of the alleged trinity of Bilgee, wolves, and Nature, Jiang intimates that the indigenous, the animal, and Nature speak through Bilgee. Rather than offering a posthuman and ecocritical perspective, Bilgee remains a Sino-centric mouthpiece. In fact, Bilgee's teachings resemble the format of Cultural Revolution struggle meetings where the non-Han Mongolian opens with criticism of Chinese sheepishness, followed by Han self-criticism from Chen. From the outset, Bilgee lectures Chen: "You're like a sheep. A fear of wolves is in your Chinese bones. That's the only explanation for why you people have never won a fight out here" (1), empty rhetoric indeed given Bao's and the Han people's imminent victory over Bilgee and Mongolians (1). At any rate, Bilgee reinforces this dichotomy: "You Chinese have the courage of sheep, who survive by foraging grass. We Mongols are meat-eating wolves" (21). Jiang also makes sure his puppet "Papa" links the non-Han with the Big Good Wolf Genghis Khan: "Back when Genghis Khan formed his army, he always picked the best wolf hunters" (12). Mongolian success is thus credited to wolf-like prowess, which transpired, incidentally, seven centuries ago. A la Bilgee, Chen enacts self-criticism, reminiscent of a Maoist struggle meeting: "China's small-scale peasant economy and Confucian culture have weakened the people's nature" (304). Chen's analysis even calls for revitalization of the national character "by cutting away the decaying parts of Confucianism and grafting a wolf totem sapling into it" (377). A totem is imagined to be a living organism to energize any Sinic werewolf.

Not only is Bilgee's Mongolian viewpoint highly suspect but the seemingly animal, posthuman, and ecocritical voices come from sinologized wolves in sheepskin as well. Wolves are mindlessly anthropomorphized, often cast in military terminologies and martial metaphors, both favored in the People's Republic of China discourse: "Here's some of what the wolves knew: weather, topography, opportunity, their and their enemy's strengths, military strategy and tactics, close fighting, night fighting, guerrilla fighting, mobile fighting, long-range raids, ambushes, lightning raids… they were as conversant with guerrilla tactics as our Eighth Route Army" (97). Wolves know nothing of the kind—clearly a case of human projection onto wolf behavior. Digging a hole to avoid summer heat, Little Wolf supposedly "squinted to form a smile," as if proudly showing off to his adoptive father Chen, who muses, sentimentally, that the cub is sired by "the current king of the wolves" (336). This melodramatic wishful thinking grows toward the end: just as Little Wolf is about to die, he is believed to be sired by the White Wolf King (491). Chengzhou He in "The Wolf Myth" calls such passages "Environmental Sentimentalism," which only deflects unendurable horror, for Little Wolf is doomed when Chen de-fanged him, resulting in tooth abscess and the impossibility of ever surviving in the wild. It is revealing that in an article on sentimentalism, Chengzhou He details the rising of Little Wolf's spirit in a sky-burial (790), thus continuing Jiang's sentimental elevation without getting down to the root cause of such soppiness. Even Jiang himself touches on Chen's pangs of conscience and his true motive for owning the cub: The cub was neither "orphaned

[n]or abandoned. He, on the other hand, had stolen the cub from its den, an entirely selfish act intended to satisfy a desire for novelty and for study… for what he wanted was to enter the wolf totem realm of the grassland people" via the cub (266). Just as Chen is a self-professed egoist, Jiang Rong is ethnocentric in fashioning and exploiting Mongolian customs. Just as Mongolian wolves are valorized, dogs, or Chinese sheep/dogs, are maligned: "Dogs have regressed far from their wolfish origins. These days dogs are weak, or lazy, or stupid. Just like people" (146). The implication is clear: dogs and Chinese are so lazy that they need to reactivate their ancestral wolf genes.

In Jiang's Sino-centric fictitious universe, Mongolians and wolves are paired yet with a third foreign totemic symbol: the West, a complex spectrum from nomadic and barbaric to refined high culture.[8] Herein, Jiang's broad strokes and cultural stereotypes are shockingly antiquated. Equipped with his college education, Chen goes beyond Bilgee in associating wolves with Westerners: "The Westerners who fought their way back to the East were all descendants of nomads… The Chinese, with their weak dispositions, are in desperate need of a transfusion of that vigorous, unrestrained blood of wolves" (218). Two allusions in particular hinge on the genesis of Romans. When Chen observes that "the ancestors of the Huns, the Gaokus, and the Turks were wolf children, all raised by wolf mothers" (100), it harks back to the mythical twin brothers and founders of Rome, Romulus and Remus, suckled and raised by a mother wolf. Later, Chen expands the claim to "Westerners are descendants of barbarians, nomadic tribes such as the Teutons and the Anglo-Saxons. They burst out of the primeval forest like wild animals after a couple of thousand years of Greek and Roman civilization, and sacked ancient Rome" (173). One supposes that in Chen's scheme of things, Rome had become civilized and was replaced by new nomads. Be that as it may, self-contradiction and faulty logic run rampant through the novel.

One perfect example of textual incongruity is the ambiguity attributed to the West. Deemed barbaric, the West also inspires Chen and Yang with sophisticated "high" culture. London's *The Call of the Wild* is the frame of reference for much of Chen's endeavor. Influenced by Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*, Yang worships the beauty of Mongolian swans and laments their demise in the hands of Chinese migrants. The West forks into two "wolf gangs"—one lowly and violent, the other lofty and aesthetic—reflecting the millennial ascent of a self-splitting China. Exploiting domestic cheap labor and the proletariat's powerlessness, China's captains of industry, the new wolf gang, sanction the Wild West of London et al., but China simultaneously upgrades itself via Western high culture as in, pardon my

[8] Chengzhou He in "Poetic Wolves and Environmental Imagination" argues that because of defeats in the early part of the twentieth century, the Chinese began to study this "foreign, alien but vital image in Western culture" such as in Jack London. He contends that "the Western wolf images were brought in and praised in order to break down the centuries-old feudal ideas of passivity and obedience that had confined the minds of Chinese people and suppressed their natural desires and feelings" (399).

German, Wolf/gang—Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and the like, from classical music to luxuries like Louis Vuitton and Mercedes-Benz. Among other things, the light-hearted tunes of a Viennese musical prodigy mask the brutal reality of survival of the fittest. Not to mince words, the Wolfgangs from the West are the soft, beautiful sheep's clothing worn by the wolf gang stalking fresh meat and blood. Accordingly, *Wolf Totem* repeatedly pays tribute to Jack London's Naturalism, despite the contradictory nationalist fervor within and in the wake of *Wolf Totem*.

A wolf gang justifies savagery by convincing itself that it is a victimized lamb. Such ideological brainwashing from self-belittling to self-glorification, from inferiority to superiority, drones on in Jiang Rong, spreading like a cancer from the text to the paratext. An Paoshuen's Preface raises the rhetorical question of whether the Chinese are "dragon's descendants" or "wolf's descendants." An's hyperbolic question stems from the style of inflated discourse in PRC, from the 1950s Great Leap Forward slogan of "Surpass England, Overtake America" to today'*s People's Daily* headlines and *China Central Television* news scripts. Appealing to ethnocentric sentiments, An retires the Chinese self-image as the offspring of mythical dragons, replacing it with that of wolves. Since Qing dynasty emperors, those "heavenly sons" descended from dragons, have shamed us into a subcolony, An pontificates, the New PRC ought to undergo a psychological makeover to align itself with the wolf's rapacity. An's iconoclastic reinventing is underwritten by Marxist class struggle and revolutionary zeal, targeting whatever is moribund but still in power, either a political regime or a frame of mind. Although theoretically credible, the Chinese are neither dragons nor wolves, which is but a smoke screen to veil the oppression of imperial hierarchy or Social Darwinism.

The didactic, ethnocentric tone and message of An's Preface are consistent with Jiang's own paratextual materials. Jiang's novel has two dedications in staggered, poetic lines: "Dedicated to: Distinguished grassland wolves and grassland people"; "Dedicated to: The once beautiful great Inner Mongolian grassland." The fluffy, repetitive rhetoric embodies Wordsworthian "emotions recollected" less in tranquility than in hyperbole. Each chapter comes with epigraphs from supposedly historical documents, which relate but tangentially, if at all, to the thesis of Chinese sheep versus Mongolian wolf. Chapter one, for instance, lists two epigraphs. The first one draws from Fan Wenlan's *A Short Survey of Chinese History*, Vol. 1: "'The Quanroan Tribe' claims its ancestry in two white dogs, its totem possibly in the shape of the dog." The second epigraph is in classical Chinese from "The Chronicle of Xiongnu" in *The Book of Han*: "Zhou's King Mu triumphed in his expedition against the Quanroan Tribe, and returned with four white wolves and four white deer." Similar historical-cum-legendary excerpts comprise all subsequent chapter epigraphs. The cumulative affective power of wolf imageries would only hold if readers ignore the flimsy logic of an ancestral claim possibly in the dog—not wolf—totem and the utter irrelevance of campaign spoils of possibly albino animals. Jiang also concludes with a lengthy, boringly didactic

Afterword in his usual proxies of Chen and Yang. This Afterword beats the dead Mongolian wolf, so to speak, beckoning yet again the inner wolf within the Chinese.

Anglo-Euro Translation

All such nationalist paratextual materials are either completely excised or drastically condensed in Howard Goldblatt's English translation, on which my argument and many global readers must rely. An old China hand adroit in presenting Nobel laureate Mo Yan and others to the world, Goldblatt translates Jiang in a way consistent with his oeuvre: a radical rewriting in the name of translation for the non-Mandarin speaking global market. Goldblatt deletes An's Preface and all the chapter epigraphs. The Afterword is likewise trimmed to the bare bones, serving primarily to update the death of Bilgee and Erlang in Chen's return visit to Olonbulag twenty some years later. Rather than staying faithful to the Chinese original, Goldblatt separates the universal human-animal tale from Jiang's propaganda-style chaff. This Anglo-distillation undergoes secondary condensation in Annaud's *Le Dernier loup* (*The Last Wolf* 2015). Annaud retains Goldblatt's structure and further compresses it, collaging numerous episodes for dramatic effect. One intriguing change in the medium of film is Annaud's choice of having characters speak in Mandarin and Mongolian throughout, which is then translated back into English subtitles. To some extent, Annaud is being more Mongolian than Jiang's Mandarin-language novel since Mongolians speak in their own tongue and Mongolian music occasionally adorns the soundtrack. However, Annaud's seemingly restorative approach regarding language use comes with its own revisionism.

The film's opening episodes illustrate Annaud's revisionism. Originally, Jiang Rong opens in medias res with Bilgee and Chen observing through binoculars a wolf pack in action hunting gazelles. Annaud replaces that scene with Chen's voiceover and intertitles on how excited Chen is to leave the capital Beijing in 1967, away from the chaos amidst the second year of the Cultural Revolution. Annaud's establishing shots contrast, visually, the panorama and freedom of the grassland with, auditorily, the long view of history marked by the exact year and the collective trauma. Despite the appearance of historical accuracy, the unit leader Bao proceeds to introduce the two Beijing arrivals to Bilgee: They can "teach the [Mongolian] children and [teach them to] read Chinese characters." The suggestion that they would teach Mongolians countermands Mao's decree of having urban youths reeducated by the people, a transgression that as studious a cadre member as Bao dare not perpetrate. Annaud attempts to set up a clear chronology on the one hand and, on the other, to obfuscate historical facts. While Jiang has already insulated Chen and other exiles from the worst of the Cultural Revolution, Annaud further romanticizes it, giving agency and initiative to those teaching Mandarin, raising a cub, and writing about the loss of the Old Mongolia. Of course, Bilgee instructs Chen in all things Mongolian save the art of wolf-rearing. A reversal of

master-disciple roles takes place when Chen undertakes something no Mongolian has ever done before.

Chen's voiceover is tinged with sloganeering and sentimental effusiveness, both toned down in English subtitles. Annaud's opening includes the pivotal scene where Chen escapes from a wolf pack by clashing his metal stirrups, for he suddenly remembers Bilgee's advice that wolves are fearful of metal sounds, which suggest triggering traps. Barely surviving the trauma awakens Chen to the mystical power of the wolf totem. In his voiceover, a shaken Chen gasping on horseback wonders if wolves have opened the door for him to the primeval force. The Burkean doubleness of awe—near-death experience and palpable spirituality—impregnates Chen's awakening. A spin-off of Burke's duality is that what is sublime may come across as Chen's narcissistic theatrics to those unmoved by filmic chicanery of wolves shot against a green backdrop at a studio, under the tutorage of the Canadian wolf whisperer Andrew Simpson.[9] In the subsequent scene in a yurt, Chen reads to the Bilgee family, who are probably semi-literate in terms of Mandarin, about Genghis Khan's exploits and his kinship to Tengger. What is quintessentially the glory of Mongolia must now be translated back to Mongolians by a Chinese book and a Chinese reader. Queried by Gasmai on a certain passage, Chen probes for words, coming up with "If not free, then die," a distant echo of the West, namely, Patrick Henry's "Give me liberty, or give me death." Chen proceeds to confess to Bilgee: "*Xiang ni tanbai: wo bei lang mizhu le*" ("To level with you: I am entranced/smitten by wolves"). The subtitle simplifies it as "To be honest. Wolves fascinate me," which is when Chen broaches the idea of rearing a cub. Neither the subtitle nor my parenthetical translation brings out the shades of meaning within the original Chinese. "*Tanbai*" goes back a long way to the Cultural Revolution, a term of euphemism for coerced confessions, often under physical and psychological duress, during struggle meetings. Notwithstanding the unsavory association with the mendacity and ferocity of Mao's campaign, the somber tone of baring one's soul abruptly causes a silly, child-like grin to appear on Chen's face as he ends with "*mizhu le*." "Fascinate" is far too mild a word to render the familiar Chinese phrase, most often appearing as "*bei hulijing mizhu le,*" or "infatuated by the fox spirit," female ghosts or seductresses who mislead and ruin men. Chen's object of love is not a woman, but his dreamy, boyish chuckle portends a child's passion for keeping a pet, a passion awaiting the adult's approval and indulgence. Bringing up a wild wolf as a pet contradicts the spirit of animal studies and posthumanism, for it signals an unbalanced relationship between an owner and possessions. Although Chen later bemoans that he appears to be the slave serving his winter ration of meat to the growing, voracious Little Wolf, he is the one who clips off Little Wolf's fangs and seals its fate. The de-fanging does not come to pass in Annaud, who packages the human-canine relationship in a more "humane,"

[9] See Tessa Thorniley's "Andrew Simpson: the Wolf Whisperer" in *The Telegraph*, 25 June 2012.

more palatable way, ultimately making possible the final release of Little Wolf in the wild.

This linguistic masquerade lost in subtitles extends from Chen's lines to Bilgee's. When Chen shares the hardships of raising a wolf cub against Mongolian customs and Nature's Law, Bilgee commiserates in accented, faltering Mandarin: "*Laohua shuo: qihunanxia*," which means "as the old saying goes, hard to dismount a tiger when riding it." An apt description of Chen's dilemma of being stuck with the cub, this Mongolian saying happens to not only follow the traditional Chinese format of four-character aphorisms but it *is* one of such aphorisms. On the one hand, Annaud's script improves Jiang's novel in terms of authentic Mongolian speech patterns, evidenced by Bilgee's, Gasmai's, and most Mongolians' code-switching between apparently fluent Mongolian and decidedly staccato Mandarin. A sinologized Mongolian, Bao is the odd man out. After his first greeting of Bilgee in Mongolian, Bai switches in the rest of the film to his Northern Chinese accent. On the other hand, Annaud transposes a Chinese figure of speech into an "old saying" in Mongolia, historically devoid of tigers and hence the basis for that proverb. Even if there were such an old Mongolian maxim, Bilgee would have said it in Mongolian by force of habit. Bilgee, like the spectral totem, is but a conduit for Chinese expressions, a spectacle of the ventriloquizing puppet on the Chinese stage.

In transcribing Jiang to the big screen, Annaud employs all the filmmaking techniques at his disposal. Chen's voiceover provides a structure from the arrival of a bookish Beijing youth to the final farewell to Little Wolf, now full-grown, across the wide expanse of grassland. That epic panorama in extreme long shots punctuates the entire film, the visual aesthetics intensified by the soundtrack's torrent of symphonic music, interspersed with solos of indigenous Mongolian string instruments and chordal singing. In addition, Annaud toggles between long shots of stunning landscape and close-ups of equally becoming faces of the two protagonists, Chen and Gasmai. Described by Chen as an "elder sister-in-law," "big sister," "kindly old aunt or a perky younger one" in the novel (133), Annaud exploits that shifting metaphor of what appears to be the only woman in Mongolia, turning her into Chen's love interest. The incipient romance demonstrates Annaud's filmic compression and dramatization of the five-hundred-plus page novel.

Annaud's camera favors the face and body of Gasmai, the only female, from the outset. When Bao brings Chen and Yang to Bilgee's yurt, the first close-up of a Mongolian is that of Gasmai's face, leaning over from behind the cow she is milking, greeting in Mongolian. As Batu's wife, Gasmai is out of reach for Chen in the novel. But Batu dies some forty minutes into the film, and Gasmai the widow becomes fair game. In fact, even prior to her widowhood, a respite after gazelle harvesting by a frozen lake escalates into a bantering and physical tussling where Gasmai and Chen enjoy a brief moment of intimacy, a flash of their imminent romance. Annaud proceeds to develop Chen's love for Gasmai alongside his love for Little Wolf, both thwarted in the end, for the most heartbreakingly romantic

scenario is always aborted romance. Annaud condenses several episodes scattered in the novel into a cross-cutting dramatization between Batu dying in a wolf attack against military horses and, on the same stormy night, Gasmai pulling on a wolf's tail caught in a tight flock of sheep. As the ice storm and wolf bites bring down Batu, Annaud repeatedly intercuts to Gasmai struggling to hang on, with the strong gale tearing open her fur coat, exposing her snow-white lower body and thighs in medium shots and close-ups—a moment conjoining Death and the Maiden, although the eroticism never quite climaxes into *la petite mort* with Chen.

Their love remains unconsummated in yet another key scene of theatrical condensation approximately seventy-five minutes into the film. In one of their walks, Little Wolf strains to break free to respond to wolf howls in the distance, only to have his instinct suppressed as Chen pulls strenuously on the chain. Enraged, Little Wolf turns and bites Chen. His teeth marks alarm Gasmai who insists on dressing the wound, lest his arm be infected and possibly amputated. Alone in her yurt, Chen confesses his love. But a practical Gasmai rejects him for he will eventually return to Beijing. Instead, she is to marry, with Bilgee's blessing, Bao's brother to help, presumably, cement the relationship between nomads and settlers—a plot twist not in Jiang's novel. The gentle touch to apply ointment to Chen's arm, their low whisper, a fleeting embrace, and a subsequent kiss serve but to tug at the heartstrings of the audience. Little Wolf's natural instinct to howl is obstructed by his owner; the lovers' instinct to unite is also crushed by their "owner," a Beijing that will reclaim Chen in its fold and that has orchestrated Bao and his brethren's push westward.

A Sino-Anglo-Euro transnational metamorphosis of sorts materializes in front of the eyes of global cinema when Jean-Jacques Annaud transforms Jiang Rong's novel by way of Howard Goldblatt's sanitized English translation into, in its release in France, *Le Dernier loup.* Romantic and nostalgic like his Orientalist corpus, including *The Lover* (1992) and *Seven Years in Tibet* (1997), Annaud's film taps into pressing ecological and environmental concerns of the West, while downplaying the original novel's nationalistic and jingoistic tenor that has appealed to the Chinese public, a tenor the German sinologist Wolfgang Kubin calls "fascist."[10] In his career in the last decade of the last millennium, Annaud used to skirt along the edges of the Chinese empire: first tinkering with the French author Marguerite Duras' novel on the forbidden love between a Cholon "Chinaman" and a French girl; then revising an Austrian Nazi mountain climber's memoirs of his years spent with the teenage Dalai Lama. By way of Vietnam and Tibet, Annaud now enters into the heart of the Middle Kingdom, filming a Chinese best-seller set in Inner Mongolia with joint Chinese-French financing, specifically, from China Film Company, Beijing Forbidden City Company, and Repérage, in that order as the credits roll. As Jiang's protagonist Chen Zhen seeks to access the realm of the wolf

[10] See Qian Meng and Noritah Omar as well as the Wolfgang Kubin entry in http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wolfgang_Kubin#cite_note-10.

totem via Little Wolf, resulting in the cub's death, Annaud has found a way, through aesthetic cinematography and exquisite filmmaking, to de-sinologize Jiang and de-fang the new wolf from the East for global cinema. The de-fanging of Jiang's ethnocentrism is endorsed, or at least uncensored, by Chinese sponsors, who understand the possible adverse effect of baring "red [in] tooth and claw" to the world.[11]

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[11] See Tennyson's *In Memoriam*: "Who trusted God was love indeed / And love Creation's final law / Tho' Nature, red in tooth and claw / With ravine, shriek'd against his creed."

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