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## Wolf totem book pdf

Fiction » Historical Fiction By Jiang Rong Translated by Howard Goldblatt Reviewed by Howard Y. F. Choy MCLC Resource Center Publication (Copyright April 2009) Jiang, Rong. Wolf Totem Tr. Howard Goldblatt.New York: Penguin USA, 2008. pp. 554. ISBN 9781594201561 (cloth); ISBN-10: 0143115146, ISBN-13: 978-0143115144 (paper). Jiang Rong's Wolf Totem (狼图腾) became a cultural sensation in China when it was published in 2004—a flashpoint for historical, spiritual, and cultural concerns.[1] Although Jiang Rong 姜戎 (pseudonym of Lü Jiamin 吕嘉民), a former political science professor and democracy activist jailed after the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, intended his debut novel as a political fable to appeal for freedom and popular elections, it has often been regarded in commercial circles as a business handbook for the practice of wolf wisdom in market competition. As a cultural phenomenon, its wolf symbolism is as celebrated as it is controversial: it critiques Confucianism in light of militarism, calls for environmental protection and sustainability according to the law of the jungle (or, in Jiang Rong's own term, "grassland logic"), and advocates "peaceful" survival of the fittest through territorial expansion and a renewed space race. Wolf Totem is a quasi-autobiographical novel about a Han Chinese urban intellectual's personal experience on the steppes in north-central Inner Mongolia during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Chen Zhen, the author's alter ego, spends a decade of nomadic life in the Ujimchin Banner on the Chinese border of Inner and Outer Mongolia. It is in this contact zone that the protagonist ponders the complex interrelationship between Mongolianness and Han Chineseness. He soon becomes fascinated with Mongolian wolves and Genghis Khan (1167-1227), the phantom of a wolfish heroism that once occupied China and founded a vast empire across Eurasia. When Chen risks a clash with his hosts' totem and taboos by adopting a wolflin as a pet, he finds himself adapting to a nomadic brave new world, where he witnesses a wilderness paradise in the process of being lost to the impact of internal colonization. The novel closes with Chen's burden of guilt over having "snipped off the canines of the . . . cub, stripping him of his freedom with a chain during his short life, and in the end crushing his head" (Jiang 371; Goldblatt 521). The pleasure of reading is swiftly aroused in the beginning of the novel by its wolf lore—pages of breathtaking descriptions of wolf raids on gazelles and prized horses, followed by bloody wolf hunting. The problem with such pleasure is that the gory graphic details render violence not only delightful and entertaining, but also sublime and sacred. Wolves are portrayed as warriors and strategists, with high spirits and esprit de corps, and masterly hunting tactics in spying, encircling, ambushing, assaulting, and intercepting; they are, moreover, apotheosized as messengers from Tengger, Mongol heaven. Nevertheless, these powerful sections of the narrative fail to develop into an interesting story, as they soon yield place to the grandiose theory of evolution one third of the way into the novel. As Lee Haiyan observes, in the course of the "scientific experiment" of raising the cub, Chen Zhen's "loving gaze that elevates it to a mythic being is also an epistemological gaze that reduces it to a lab creature." [2] Little Wolf is simultaneously deified as the object of a new totemism and objectified by "wolfology" at the same time. As a literary work, then, Wolf Totem lacks a round character. The personae act merely as the author's mouthpieces for his confessions of faith. "Ever since I prostrated myself at the feet of the wolf totem," claims one of Chen's fellow students, "I've been a Mongol" (Jiang 189; Goldblatt 294). Old man Biglee—the last nomadic herdsman, renowned hunter, and enlightener of the Han educated youths—substitutes for Chairman Mao as their surrogate father. Where Mongolian horsemen and shepherds are idealized as wise mentors and moral models, Han students and settlers are stereotyped as ignorant pupils and selfish villains. Structurally, each of the thirty-five chapters opens with epigraphs excerpted from historical documents or studies. An example is the legend about Mongolian ancestry from the opening of The Secret History of the Mongols (蒙古秘史): "At the beginning there was a blue-grey wolf, born with his destiny ordained by Heaven Above." [3] Yet these quotations are hardly related to the plot, nor do they effectively enrich the story's historical dimension; rather, they serve as intrusive "proofs" of the author's banal didacticism. While their expunction from Howard Goldblatt's English translation may be seen as scholastically "unfaithful" to the original, his choice may well represent an artful way of streamlining the story. In an interview, the translator reveals that the publisher made the further decision to excise the original text's epigrammatic openings and the lengthy lecture with which it concludes. Even with these cuts, the Penguin edition of Wolf Totem does not lack for preachy commentary and lengthy exposition.[4] Indeed, Jiang Rong rewrites 5,000 years of Chinese history in the last 50,000 characters of his 500,000-character book so as to make it conform to his lupine discourse. The so-called "dialogue" in the appendix, like many conversations throughout the novel, is in effect a monological lecture, which makes one wonder whether his selection of the fictional form merely compromises what began as a research paper. Against the grain of Confucian historiography, all dynastic ups and downs are ascribed to the presence or absence of "wolf nature" in the national psyche. Thus the vicissitudes of regimes are interpreted by pendular swings between lupine and sheepish spirits in a farfetched and totalizing history.[5] The author concludes his grand narrative by opining that the Chinese people are not so much "descendants of the dragon" (龙的传人) as "disciples of the wolf" (狼的传人) and that nomads are the ancestors of the Han farming people. Seeking a barbarian civilization in the term "civilized wolf" (文明狼) as a modern transition from ancient "civilized sheep" to future "civilized man," he advocates "nomadizing" peasant mentality and the necessity to "Mongolianize" Han culture. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the jarring sermon that comprises the last one tenth of the work has also been cut from the English rendition. Chinese critic Li Jianjun has pointed out that Wolf Totem is a product of an age of evacuated values and cultural crisis, with humanism in retreat and science at the forefront, and in which the law of the market has become a new ideology, or rather, a new form of the Marxist-Maoist philosophy of struggle.[6] Indeed, Jiang Rong's extremism echoes Stalin's social Darwinist statement about "the jungle law of capitalism" in his 1931 speech to industrial managers: "You are backward, you are weak—therefore you are wrong; hence, you can be beaten and enslaved. You are mighty—therefore you are right; hence, we must be wary of you." [7] In the wolf's worldview, one either hunts or is hunted. Eulogizing European imperialism and Japanese militarism, Jiang Rong's radicalism reveals ironically his misunderstanding of democracy as mobocracy. His cruel fantasy of territorialization through terrorization has been labeled by Chinese and Western critics alike as "fascism." [8] If "crypto-fascist" still sounds too harsh, it is at least fair to contextualize Wolf Totem in the dominant discourse of new nationalism that searches for national pride and power. Wolf Totem is reminiscent of Zhang Chengzhi's 张承志 educated youth fiction of Inner Mongolia produced in the late 1970s and 1980s, including his novella "The Black Steed" (黑骏马) and novel Golden Prairie (金牧场), in which Zhang reconstructs his Hui identity by identifying with yet another minority nationality rather than the Han majority. In the context of Chinese literary history, Nicole Barnes considers "Wolf Totem the latest literary expression of a long-lived Chinese political identity crisis in which fear of emasculation drives Han men to their nation's cultural frontier in an existential search for virility and assertiveness, qualities believed to be more abundant among the ethnic minorities than among China's Han majority," [9] The antidote Jiang Rong prescribes for the "feminized" Han national character is the "blood transfusion" of Mongolian machismo. While the Han majority has taken pride in its ability to Sinicize all minorities, the novelist proposes to introject Mongolian otherness onto Han selfhood in antitheses of nomads/farmers, carnivores/herbivores, brutalsm/domestication, liberalsm/Confucianism, and wolf worship/sheep spirit. In these simple binary pairs the former is deemed good, brave and intelligent, whereas the latter is bad (if not evil), weak and stupid. Such binary oppositions present to us not only a clash of nomadic and agrarian civilizations but also, because the latter is derogated to the rudimentary stage of world history, a crisis of superiority and inferiority complexes. Cover of the Chinese edition of Wolf Totem Although Jiang Rong's alleged opposition to Han chauvinism in his ethnic epic turns the superiority of the Han majority and the inferiority of the ethnic minorities upside down, its representational construction remains homogeneous. A mere reversal of binary relations is not actualprogress beyond oppression, but merely a re-enactment of colonization of the other. Now the "other" is oneself, but the same mindset is at play. This kind of otherism simply inverts the first two of anthropologist Stevan Harrell's three images of peripheral peoples in China—women (sexual metaphor), children (educational metaphor), and ancients (historical metaphor). In presenting the Mongolian way as a masculine and mature model for the modern majority Han people to follow, the text also subverts the colonizer's Confucian and Communist civilizing projects by criticizing Confucian passivity and Communist bureaucracy.[10] Jiang Rong's radical anti-Confucianism, inherited from the May Fourth movement and the Cultural Revolution, reveals, in historian Lin Yü-sheng's words, "the crisis of Chinese consciousness." While it is understandable why Jiang Rong has been accused of arousing ethnic antagonism at a time when the Chinese government advocates the construction of a "socialist harmonious society" based on Confucianism, it may be unfair to charge him with having had a detrimental impact on national unity.[11] The fact that he has publicly complained about the English translation of Hanren 汉人 as "Chinese" reflects his anti-separatism. [12] Of course there are reasons for Goldblatt's word choice: firstly, unlike Mongols and Tibetans, the ethnonym Han is not widely known among Western readers; second, the Han ethnic group as the unified majority are so predominant that "Chinese" has become a synonym of Hanren and Hanyu 汉语; third and most important, the translator may consciously or unconsciously disagree with the irredentism that maps Mongolia as a necessary part of China. The battle of the "Chinese" author and his English translator about this single term may in fact represent an encounter between different political views. One may therefore wonder what kind of "outsider" the translator means when he notes in his introduction that Wolf Totem is "the intelligent ethnological observations of a sympathetic outsider" (Goldblatt vi), and what sort of "sympathy" is provoked by Han-Mongol relations. Chen Zhen's "sympathy" for his miserable Mongolian compatriots under the government's wolf-eradication campaign is expressed in environmentalism—the term's two senses of ecological concern and belief in the influence of the milieu on the race. With the desertification of twenty-eight percent of the Chinese territory, Han colonizers are condemned for continuously cultivating the fragile grasslands into farmlands. Cultivation contaminates a pure landscape and tames wild nature. In Jiang Rong's eco-poetics, the loss of naturalness in the destructive process of Mao's development campaigns, followed by Deng's materialistic modernization, is related to the withering of militaristic morale. Here "natural" is not neutral, but allegorically points to the politics of essentializing ethnicity.[13] "Natural" is the meat-eating Mongolian nomadism, whereas the grains-and-greens Chinese diet is regarded as the reason for regression of the Han people. Like the degradation of Mongol horses due to the lack of training by predatory wolves, Sinicized Mongols are denigrated for having been deprived of their wolfishness and having become "sheep-like" farming communities. When this ecological ethnography ends in a sandstorm in Beijing at the advent of the new millennium, Chen commiserates with the motorized horsemen's dilemma: the stark choice between economic prosperity and ecological poverty. As the Chinese ancestral land is relocated in the pristine Mongolian grasslands and the Chinese dragon totem is replaced by vibrant Mongolian wolves, China is reinvented in the familiar foreignness of the romanticized minority other. It is a "familiar foreignness" because the majority is always already a hybridity of minorities. However, by attributing sheepishness to Han Chinese, Jiang Rong ignores China's history of imperial self-aggrandizement. Such willful ignorance may prove to be fully as dangerous as overlooking a wolf in sheep's clothing. Howard Y. F. Choy Wittenberg University Notes: [1] Jiang Rong, Lang tuteng (Wuhan: Changjiang wenyi, 2004). [2] Haiyan Lee, "The Lord of the Wolves?" The China Beat (June 19,2008). [3] Jiang 85; Igor de Rachewiltz, trans. and comm. The Secret History of the Mongols: A Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century. 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2006). 1.1. [4] See Michaela Kabat's and Paul Pennay's interview with Howard Goldblatt, "Beijing Bookworm International Literary Festival—Howard Goldblatt and Wolf Totem" (13 Mar. 2008), the Beijinger (. This is yet another case of the publisher's active role in the task of translation. [5] For instance, in order to force Zhou-dynasty (1045-256 B.C.) history into his story, Jiang Rong (374) equates jackals with wolves in a sentence about King Wu's (r. 1045-1043 B.C.) army cited from Sima Qian's 司马迁 (145-ca. 86 B.C.) Shi ji 史记 (The grand scribe's records) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959). 4,123, without researching to discover that the original text in the extant version of Shang shu 尚书 (Book of documents) lists neither wolves nor jackals but panthers. [6] Li Jianjun 李建军, introduction to Long Xingjian 龙行健 [Sun Yongli 孙永俐], Lang tuteng pipan 狼图腾批判 (Critique of Wolf Totem) (Shanghai: Xuelin, 2007), ii-iii. Li describes Wolf Totem as "anti-humanism, anti-civilization." [7] [Joseph] Stalin, "The Tasks of Business Executives," in his Problems of Leninism (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1947), 356. [8] See Long, Lang tuteng pipan, 227; interview with Wolfgang Kubin, "Deguo Hanxue quanwei ling yi zhi yan kan xiandangdai Zhongguo wenxue" 德国汉学权威另一只眼看现当代中国文学 (Authoritative German Sinologist looks at modern and contemporary Chinese literature with a different eye) (26 Nov. 2006), Deutsche Welle, Chinese edn., listed under "Wenxue yishu" 文学艺术 (Literature and art); English translation by Priest Liu, "Wolfgang Kubin on Contemporary Chinese Literature," can be accessed at EastSouthWestNorth Culture Blog; also Linda Javin, review of Wolf Totem, Australian Literary Review ( May 7, 2008); the third civilizing project, according to Harrell, is the Christian missionaries' project from the West, [11] Long, Lang tuteng pipan, 28, 215-246. There are sections discussing Confucianism in Long's book, pp. 106-128, which are unfortunately too shallow and full of pitfalls in its understanding of the Confucian traditions and teachings. [12] Eric Abrahamsen, "Translation Cause: Jiang Rong vs. Howard Goldblatt" (28 Mar. 2008), Paper Republic (. [13] Historian Timothy Weston, in his "A Defense of Jiang Rong's Wolf Totem" (The China Beat [July 25, 2008]), draws a close parallel between Han Chinese ignorance about the natural environment and their arrogance toward minority cultures but argues that they are not irredeemable: "Ethnicity is not treated in an essentialist fashion in this novel." While it is true in Weston's observation that there are indeed a few "good" Han Chinese like the protagonist and "bad" Mongols who are insensitive to the environment, the problem of Jiang Rong's environmental ethnography remains: the Han would not become a "good ethnic group" unless they are Mongolianized, nor would some Mongols degenerate into a "bad ethnic group" were they not Sinicized.

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