

Chinese Superstitions Are Detrimental to the Survival of Tiger and Rhinoceros

Wong Yuk (王煜)

From the novel and movie *Out of Africa*, we can admire picturesque landscapes and wonderful animals of Africa. Even scholars compiled *From Africa to Zen: An Invitation to World Philosophy* (Robert C. Solomon & Kathleen M. Higgins, eds. Lanham, Maryland, USA: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1993), whose "Introduction" refuted the prejudice that global philosophy is simply sampling a taste of China, Africa and Latin America, perhaps a slightly fuller serving of India. Solomom and Higgins claimed, "There has been no attempt to map Confucian, Buddhist, and Arabic traditions of philosophy onto (or against) the Western tradition, and we have taken great pains not to take the Greek-medieval-European tradition of Socrates through Sartre as the prototype of what philosophy should be. . . . The emphasis on control and domination has endangered and sometimes destroyed the environment." Although Leibniz and Voltaire ranked Chinese culture partly higher than European culture, David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames in the first chapter "Understanding Order: The Chinese Perspective" still cited Lin Yü-t'ang's 林語堂 *The Importance of Living* (New York: John Day, 1937, p. 46): "the reason why the Chinese failed to develop botany and zoology is that the Chinese scholar cannot stare coldly and unemotionally at a fish without immediately thinking of how it tastes in the mouth and wanting to eat it." At least Chuang Chou 莊周 and Hui Shih 惠施 were not so vulgar, since Taoist and Sophist naturalism transcends Confucian and Moist ethnocentrism and anthropocentrism. Despite fishing, Chuang Tzu did not undermine the survival of fish; not to mention the pragmatic concern of Confucius, Mencius, and Hsün Tzu 荀子 for letting animals live. Both Confucians and Taoists pursue aesthetic harmony with nature or community. Most sages are contented in philosophy like the Chinese name of professor Roger Ames "安樂哲". But common people seek profit even at the cost of righteousness, particularly ecological balance. Utterly ignorant and superstitious, both ancients and moderns drove or drive various sublime and beautiful beasts to extinction. Most regrettably, no elephant bird exists in

Madagascar, the largest island of Africa. In the last century these gigantic birds totally died of human avarice rather than superstition. Alas! African and Asian rhinoceros and tigers face extermination due to both greediness and superstition, rather than religion against greediness and cruelty, though Albert Schweitzer advocated reverence for life and practised it in Africa.

In the *Book of Rites* 禮記 Confucius exclaimed that tyranny was more horrible than tiger. The Romanian-French dramatist Ionesco authored *Rhino* to mock at ugly conformity. However, tiger and rhino symbolize sublimity, might, courage and invulnerability. In the Warring States, Rhino-head 犀首 became the title of some high officials. For Japanese war-mongers, Tora! Tora! Tora! 虎虎虎 represented their project of invading Honolulu during World War II. Among Chinese maxims, tigers trapped in P'ing-yang 平陽 is compared to dragons confined to shallow water. According to Chinese legend, protractile tiger penis and protrudent rhino uni-corn enhance erotic pleasure and sexual capability, as tiger skin signifies political power, while rhino horn also stands for love and mutual yearning 相思 between man and woman. Tiger bones and rhino skin are wrongly believed to possess miraculous healing effect. Factually the effect is negligible. Taiwan merchants keep tigers to be sources of soup, medicine and erotic stimulant. I am delighted to know that the Government has taken action to protect rare creatures. In China Mainland, merchants rear bears to profit from their skin, palm and gut, strongly against Confucianism and Buddhism. Diametrically opposite to human brutality to brutes, Indian Jainism respects all kinds of life, including germs and bacteria. Unfortunately, both Jains and Buddhists as religious minorities cannot benefit the survival of rare animals. Dominant Hindus and Moslems have been indifferent to tigers and rhinos until conservationists make television documentary films to waken them from dogmatic slumber. Indian environmentalists lament poachers's slaughter of wild animals around lakes, where tigers, monkeys, and peacocks drank water. Five thousand Indian tigers survive poaching disaster, let alone Siberian and Chinese tigers. Asians must face tiger crisis with moral courage.

In China Mainland, the excessive killing of birds led to overgrowth of pests like worms. The students of Nan-ning 南寧 in Kwang-hsi 廣西 dared not go to school for fear of swarming worms in street trees. Over-killing owls resulted in excessive rats. Now only ten per cent of 100 thousand rare birds live in the "Swan Lake" of Tsing-hai 青海 Province. As a medical illiterate, Mao Tze-tung was also ignorant of ecology. In Hsin Pao 信報 (May 22, 1994) of Hong Kong, Ku Wo 顧我 published "醫學文盲—毛澤東", which

may enlighten superstitious Chinese mass of people. The Confucius proverb should be modernized as "Tyranny is more horrible than poaching tiger!"

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CONTENTS

Articles

- Chinese-Philippine Diplomatic Relations 1946-1975
..... Hsiao Shi-ching (蕭曦清) 1
- The Spreading of Aristotle's Political Theory
in China Mi Chenfeng (米辰峰) 49
- Notes on Dramatic Theories of Aristotle and Li Yü
..... Jingsong Chen (陳勁松) 63
- The 1989 Chinese Students' Movement Considered
as a Nonviolent Movement Song Yongyi (宋永毅) 73
- Chinese Superstitions Are Detrimental to the
Survival of Tiger and Rhinoceros Wong Yuk (王煜) 89

Appendix

- A Bibliography of Chinese Articles and Books
on the Sung History (Supplement) (*Cont'd*)
【宋史研究論文與書籍目錄(增訂本)】補遺
..... Fang Chien-hsing (方建新) and Pan Shu-chiung (潘淑瓊) 93

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