

The Modern Totem

The Status of National Animals in Modern Nations

The Symbol Formation

Natural Animal



Neutral

From Natural to Constructed Animals

Animals are given human attributes based on their natural traits, human-animal interaction and human biases. e.g. a lion is a large-sized carnivore and has few enemies. Hence, it is thought to be fierce, powerful, dominant. The neutral image is converted to a image with good or bad personalities.

Constructed Animal



Good & Bad

From Constructed to National Animals

The animal image is modified to represent the state. The image is always positive and heroic. e.g. lions must not be “bullying” but “fight for justice” although both are possible for constructed animals. The animal species can be selected based on pre-national history (Indian Tiger), or as a new creation (US Eagle).

National Animal

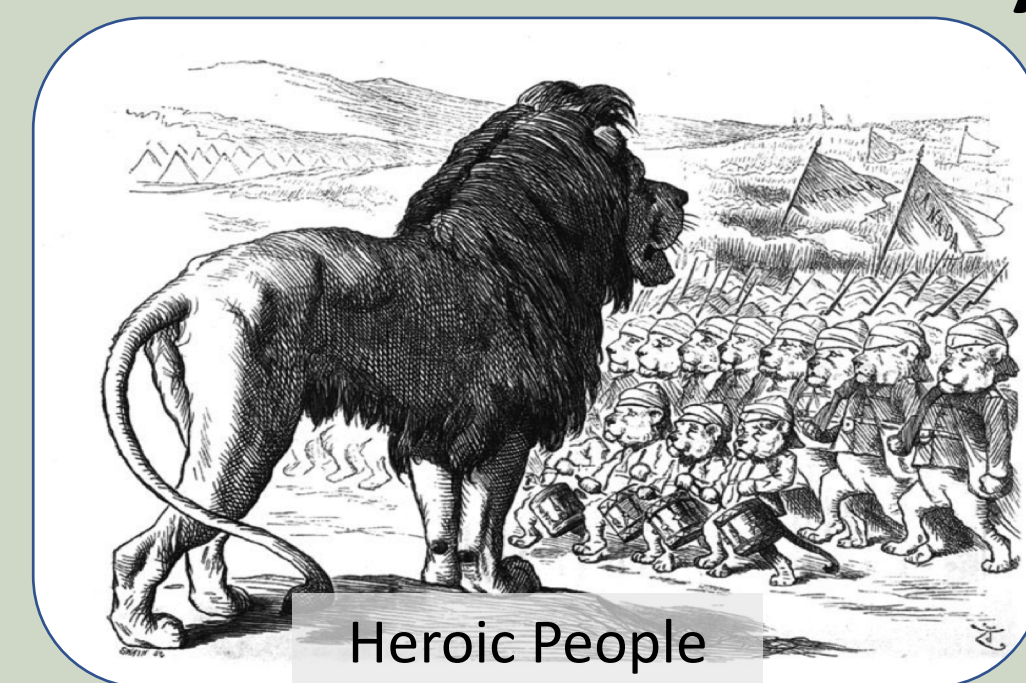


Heroic

From National Animal to Animal Identity

The state representation can be transformed into personal self-understanding. Human-animal intimacy due to biological proximity and social interaction enable citizens to perceive themselves as the national animal with affiliated attributes. e.g. British people can believe themselves as free lions who should not be led by other powers.

National Animal Identity



Heroic People

Rationale: This research analyzes the formation of national animals, explores their inadequate salience in reality and highlights their theoretical superiority compared to other national symbols. The research argues the national animal is a modern manifestation of the ancient totemism, which has the potential to construct a social animal identity. Such national animal identity deserves further investigation in different disciplines.

The Neglected Symbol

The national animal has very little substantial political impact in reality

Fundamental Reasons

- ❖ diminishing human-animal interaction



city zoo



commercial farm

- ❖ internal disagreement (social division)



regional division



species competition

- ❖ serves non-political aims (conservation)



Grenada dove



US bison

Operational Reasons

- ❖ requires political uncertainties/emergencies
emotional, intuitive impulses provoked



war



crisis

- ❖ needs effective trigger linking
animal identity—attribute—specific-action



“in the lion’s den”
brave to fight fascism



“let the lion roar”
independent via Brexit

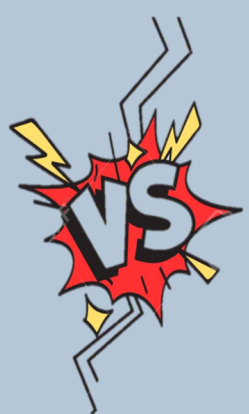
The Superior Symbol

The national animal is a theoretically better symbol than conventional ones



South Korea emblem

meaningless
abstraction



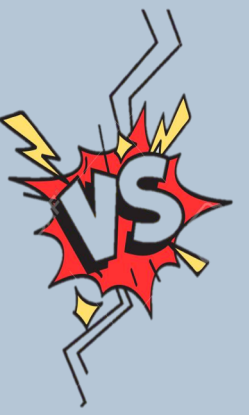
South Korea Tiger

straightforward
characters



Canada emblem

distant
common property



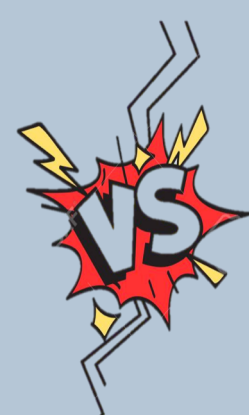
Canada Beaver

perceivable
national self-identity



USSR/US flags

parallel listing



Soviet Bear
US Eagle

cross-national
interactions

The Crucial Symbol

The study of national animals has further implications in many research disciplines

Nationalism Studies

How does the national animal complement & interact with other national symbols?
e.g. Mexico flag contains a eagle

Cultural Studies

Are there distinctive national traits derived from national animal identity?
e.g. Does the Russian bear encourage aggression?

Media Studies

What’s the implication of media portrayal of countries using animals?
e.g. *The Economist* magazine covers

Foreign Policy Making

Does the national animal reflect foreign policies?
e.g. Canada’s intention to replace beaver with polar bear shows more assertive foreign policies?