The Modern Totem
The Status of National Animals in Modern Nations

The Symbol Formation
Natural Animal

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 picture with good or bad personalities.

Constructed Animal

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

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

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

meaningless abstraction vs. straightforward characters

South Korea emblem: South Korea Tiger vs. South Korea emblem

Canada emblem: Canada Beaver vs. Canadian flag

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?

References
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