The Modern Totem
the Status of National Animals in Modern Nations

The Formed Symbol

Natural Animal

Natural animals are constructed with **human attributes** based on their natural traits, human-animal interaction and human biases. E.g. lion is a large-sized carnivore and has few enemies. Hence, it is thought to be fierce, powerful, dominant. There can be negative impressions such as blood-lusting.

Constructed Animal

National animal represents the state. The animal species can be selected based on pre-national history (Indian Tiger), or new creation (US Eagle). The human attributes are modified to create a **positive image** of the nation. For example, lions could never be "bullying" but "fight for justice" although both are ok for constructed animals.

National Animal

Natural intimacy due to biological proximity and social interaction enables **citizens perceive themselves as the national animal** with affiliated attributes. Ancient human tribes saw themselves with properties of their animal-ancestors in totemism. For example, some Brits believe they are free lions who cannot be led by others.
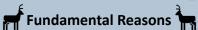

National Animal Identity

Rationale

This research presents an unprecedented analysis on the formation of national animals, exploring the discrepancy between its theoretical superiority and inadequate salience in reality. It aims to lay the foundation for further studies regarding the use of animal symbols in political science.

The Neglected Symbol

Fundamental Reasons

❖ diminishing human-animal interaction

City Zoo

Commercial Farm

❖ difficult establishment (social division)

Regional Division

Species Competition

❖ serve non-political purposes

Animal conservation

Operational Reasons

❖ require political uncertainties/emergencies

War

Crisis

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

"in the lion's den"

"let the lion roar"

The Superior Symbol

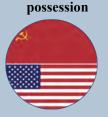
meaningless abstraction

straightforward characters

distant common possession

VS

perceivable national self-identity

parallel independent listing

possible cross-national interactions

The Crucial Symbol

Study of National animals is the **beginning point** for many other research areas

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. Are Russian people violent?

Media Studies

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

Foreign Policy Making

- Whether the national animal indicate the choice of foreign policies?
- e.g. changing beaver to polar bear indicates more assertive foreign policy?

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