The animal in the Asian imagination: alter or alter ego?

International conference organized by the Asia-Sorbonne Association, January 13 and 14, 2023.

Summary
This colloquium proposes to explore the polysemy of the imaginary of the animal, especially the wild animal, in Asia and its functions: is it an "alter ego", a protective animal, bringing to humanity its own powers, or a radical "alter", which represents a world other than humanity; what are the stakes of these various representations for humanity as for the sharing of the planet with the animal world. This alter function is manifested, for example, in the tiger, whose power is appropriated by man in the "lion" dance (舞狮 / 舞獅; wǔshī), in traditional medicine that takes its bones, and in the Chinese zodiac for which it is one of the strongest signs. It is also found in its presence as the soldier's animal double in Thai filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasethakul's "Uncle Boonmee", or as the protective animal of a Dalit in the novel The White Tiger by Indian Aravind Adiga. One also thinks of the Nāga snake, both a symbol - chthonian and aquatic -, retaining the real, naturalistic attributes of the animal in its various representations. It seems to us that if man symbolically acquires the power of the animal, it is on condition that he remains beyond a real or metaphorical man/animal boundary.

This physical boundary between man and animal is being crossed more and more frequently, notably through poaching, posing serious health risks for humanity, as demonstrated by the Covid pandemic. In this context, it seems useful to us to explore this tangential relationship and the stakes of this distancing or, on the contrary, of this coexistence with the wild animal - as well as potentially with the domestic animal in its dimension of otherness (for example, the sacred cow in Hinduism). It is postulated that the animal - bear, monkey, tiger, fox, snake - is invested with a radical, necessary otherness. Its total domestication or anthropomorphization would represent a danger, a loss of meaning. Faced with the disappearance of primary spaces and non-modernised peoples, the wild animal seems to be the ultimate reservoir of the anti-
modern, of that which escapes the Anthropocene, that which is not "for" humanity. We therefore make two interlocking hypotheses: that animal representations in traditional cultures insist on the otherness of the animal, and that this has the function of a warning: that by trying too hard to domesticate the wild, humanity will lose a source of otherness that is essential to its physiological, but also spiritual survival.

This exploration will use literary, religious, ethnographic, artistic (all mediums), naturalistic, symbolic or fantastic representations: their modalities, ambiguïtés, dynamics.

The symposium will be followed by a publication on the review of the final texts by 1923.

Fields: history of representations of the animal in Asia from the Antiquity to the present day, in art (all media), in archaeology, in classical, folk and religious literature and all forms of ethnographic or popular representations, including commercials...

Keywords: wild animal; anthropocene; animal symbolism in Asia; imaginary and iconography of the animal in Asia.

Practicalities:
Send a proposal in the form of a 300-500 word abstract with keywords and a short bibliography (APA format) and a short biography of the author (three lines), with institutional affiliation if applicable to christine.vialkayser@asie-sorbonne.fr and secretariat@asie-sorbonne.fr
The conference is open to institutional and independent researchers, doctoral students, artists and authors.
Deadline for receipt of abstracts 30 September 2022. Response to participants October 30.

Language: communications can be in French or English

Bibliographic elements:
(all web links active as of June 20, 2022)
