

# Ecological Holism Thoughts in Wolf Totem

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**Abstract:** This thesis attempts to interpret *Wolf Totem* according to the theory of Ecological Holism advocated by Eugene Odem and the ecological criticism ideas summarized by Wang Nuo to prove that *Wolf Totem* reveals such ecological holism thoughts as: 1. Respect for nature; 2. Nature is a whole in which all species are interrelated; 3. Respect for the nature of all species; 4. Look at everything from the perspective of overall ecological benefits, and thus calls for action to respect and protect both nature and the nature of all species in it.

**Keywords:** Respect for Nature. Ecological Holism. *Wolf Totem*.

In 2004, the novel "*Wolf Totem*" came out and became a sensational literary spectacle. However, there is no so-called bestselling factors like love between men and women in the novel, or hot spots of the times. The novel is heavy on the feelings between people and animals, the circulation of generations of creatures on the Erlun Prairie. Jiang Rong, the author of the novel, based on a decade of youth rooted in the prairie, describes wolves, herders, yellow goat and other creatures on the prairie in a true and vivid way, and that may be the greatest strength of the book. The book presents a solid prairie life with real details, records all the living creatures in the prairie and shows respect for nature (the old herdsmen as a positive model who pay attention to the overall ecological balance of the prairie). Today, sandstorms are raging, extreme weather disasters occur frequently and nuclear waste water pollution is threatening the global ecology. The ecological holism in "*Wolf Totem*" guides us to reflect on the current relationship between man and nature and provides a guiding light for how to deal with the relationship between man and nature (as well as the creatures in nature) in the future.

## 1. Introduction to Wolf Totem

*Wolf Totem* mainly tells the story of an educated youth who is interdependent with wolves and herdsmen when he settles down in the Erlun Prairie of Inner Mongolia in the 1960s and 1970s. The author Jiang Rong enters the narrative world of the novel with his own vivid personal experience, which leads readers into the living world of wolves with an almost autobiographical narrative perspective. The wolves in this book are a kind of magical animal. As a member of the natural world, it is an important part of the ecological link on the prairie. As a creature that used to represent the image of evil, the wolves are brave and courageous in this book, tenacious and unyielding. Even the little wolf raised by humans since childhood has maintained a nature of never surrendering and persists in breaking the reins for freedom regardless of the pains and hurts. It never gives up freedom no matter how good human beings treat him. Compared with the positive images of wolves, certain actions of human beings violate the laws of natural development of the prairie and the nature of animals. The novel also criticizes the anthropocentrism and expresses the vision of human civilization and nature in harmony. It embodies the idea of ecological holism. The author's meticulous observation, life experience all year round, and the true feelings from the heart that have accumulated for a long time, make *Wolf Totem* awaken the deep love of human beings for nature and harmony, as well as respect for animal nature.

## 2. Ecological Holism

The Ecological Holism emphasizes that the ecological system is an interrelated organic system, emphasizes the functions and the values of every species in the system.

Holistic thoughts of Eugene Odem and his holistic research method provide a theoretical basis for people's ecological research in various disciplines. His book Fundamentals of Ecology "changed ecology from the study of the microcosm to the macrocosm, the study of how everything fits together, and how human beings are part of the problem and must be part of the solution." Under his guidance, we

should not only look at the weather patterns, watersheds, regional plant, animal populations, etc...but also pay attention to a bigger picture, the correlation between them.

WANG Nuo, one of the pioneers in eco-criticism in China, summarizes the main viewpoints of ecological literature as: 1. The criticism of conquering and dominating nature; 2. The criticism of industry, science and technology; 3. The criticism of desire; 4. Ecological responsibility; 5. Ecological holistic view; 6. Returning to harmony with nature. In the "Holistic View of Ecology" section, after tracing back to the source of idea, analyzing and commenting, Wang Nuo concludes: "Rolston and others advocate that humanbeings try to understand the laws of nature and the ecological system, and then take the overall interests and internal laws of the ecological system as the fundamental starting point of all human concepts, behaviors, lifestyles and development patterns... It has laid a theoretical foundation of profound significance for mankind to alleviate and eventually eliminate the ecosystem crisis."

Ecological Holism is the core of ecology, the fundamental law of ecosystem, and the important basis for the healthy development of ecosystem. Ecological holism does not deny the right to survival of human beings provided not exceeding the ecological endurance and not endangering the development of the entire ecosystem. It does not even completely deny the control and transformation of human beings to nature. Ecological holism emphasizes that the material desires of human beings, economic growth, transformation and disruption of nature should be limited to the range that can be sustained, absorbed, degraded and restored by the ecosystem. This restriction is for the overall benefit of the ecosystem, and the overall benefit of the ecosystem is consistent with the long-term and fundamental interests of mankind.

### 3. Ecological Holism Thoughts in Wolf Totem

The Erlun Prairie in Inner Mongolia exists as a huge and complex ecological whole. Every species living in it is an important part of this huge system. The production and life of human beings are inextricably linked with every species in this system. The novel contains rich ideas of ecological holism: respect for nature, nature is a whole (all species in the whole are closely related), respect for the nature of animals. Through the unfolding of each story, the novel interprets the author's in-depth study of the prairie and his living with the wolf clan, which help him not only find the true way of life of the wolves, but also understand that the wolf clan is closely related to the rise and fall and development of the prairie. However, this group of elves living on the prairie, in the struggle with the human being, are the loser. In the face of the harsh ecology and the degradation of the prairie, where should the wolves go? The problems faced by the wolves found and reflected in this book have caused the world to struggle and think: As the initiator, how can mankind proceed from the overall ecological interests to effectively alleviate and even lift the ecological crisis?

#### 3.1 Respect for nature

One the title page of *Wolf Totem*, Jiang Rong wrote: "To: the outstanding prairie wolves and prairie people; To: the once beautiful prairie of Inner Mongolia." *Wolf Totem*, as an ecological literature work, can produce such a huge response in the literary circle, firstly, because the author has shown us the unique attraction of the Erlun Prairie in Inner Mongolia from a unique perspective. In the book, the author depicts the beautiful scenery of the prairie for readers, awakening the love of nature and the yearning for freedom in the depths of human nature.

However, in the face of the beautiful natural and pleasant scenery of the pristine prairie, Bao Shungui, Lao Wangtou, Dorji and others exposed their ignorance and greed, and chose endless requests from nature for the vested interests of mankind. This has brought irreparable and heavy damage to the natural ecological environment of the primitive prairie. "Bao Shungui, the representative of Erlun Prairie Pasture Army, is a true "butcher": He randomly slaughtered prairie wolves and unscrupulously destroyed the ecological environment of the Erlun Prairie. In order to obtain economic benefits and satisfy his appetite, Bao Shungui not only hunted prairie wolves under the guise of "wolves are class enemies", but also hunted and killed various wild animals to make delicious food. The author also launched a fierce criticism for the various behaviors of Bao Shungui, Wang Laotou and others who have damaged the ecology of the Erlun prairie. These people are ignorant of the relationship between various species. When they came to prairie, they retreat everywhere and kill all kinds of wild animals at will, which poses a serious threat to the ecological balance of the prairie. All these abnormal changes are due to the lack of respect for nature among the educated youth who have come to the countryside and the young herders who think they can conquer and transform nature, they can force out farming, and devastate the wolves. However, everything in nature has its own rules to follow, and every living thing has its own significance and value.

Although human beings are higher animals, they are also members of the nature. They should act in accordance with the laws of nature and should not arbitrarily destroy nature according to their own ideas. Once the ecological balance is lost, human beings will also be punished by nature.

In expressing the good relationship between nature and man, the mutual respect and competition between old herders and wolves touch people's hearts. In the eyes of the old herdsmen, the Wolf is sacred and has totem significance. The behavior of the Wolf is worth learning. The Wolf will steal the yellow goat, and the herdsmen will correspondingly retaliate and fight back against the Wolf, but they will not kill the wolves completely. Prairie wolves are extremely important to the Erlun prairie ecosystem: If the wolves are gone, the prairie will be the world of rabbits and mice, and the prairie will degenerate and become desert. The herders who have lived on the prairie for generations have their belief in wolf totems. In the final analysis, they form their belief in respecting nature and following the laws of nature.

### **3.2 Nature is a whole in which all species are interrelated**

On the prairie, the wolf maintains a natural ecological relationship with the herders. The herders regard the wolf as a god, a totem of the grassland, and a symbol of nature. People in the city don't understand what god means. On the Mongolian prairie, herders believe in totems. They live in harmony with wolves, awe each other, and depend on each other. The author puts the survival relationship between humans and prairie wolves in the vast biological chain of the primitive prairie, and respects the reasonable existence of each species on the prairie. For mankind is not only in contact with mankind, but also in contact with everything that exists around us. The novel provides a refreshing overall interpretation of the interrelationships between various lives on the Erlun Prairie.

First of all, Jiang Rong has expounded the relationship between "big life" and "small life" many times: Although prairie wolves will cause certain harm to the livestock production of herdsmen, it is precisely because of the existence of prairie wolves that the number of animal husbandry on the grassland can be reasonably controlled, so that the prairie may avoid ecological damage due to the overload of the animal husbandry. Moreover, the effective control of the number of herbivores such as marmots and yellow goats is also mainly due to the existence of prairie wolves. As for the horses, the main reason why the prairie people have had a strong fighting power since ancient times is that they have excellent Mongolian horses. The strong characteristics of the Mongolian horse were cultivated in the fight against the prairie wolf. However, with the excessive hunting of prairie wolves by humans, a series of ecological environment imbalance problems have also arisen: Due to over-hunting, the number of prairie wolves has drastically reduced. Without the threat of natural enemies, the number of herbivores such as marmots and yellow goats continues to increase. The vegetation of the prairie will eventually be eaten up, and these plant-eating animals will lose food, the grass will be degraded in the excessive consumption, grassy prairie will eventually become barren desert. The entire Erlun prairie ecosystem exists as a "big life", and prairie wolves, marmots, and yellow goats are the "small life" under this "big life". If the "big life" of the prairie ecosystem is devastated, then the "small life" will not be able to "live alone". There are inexhaustible internal connections between "big life" and "small life". In *Wolf Totem*, when Chen Zhen, one educated young man expressed his deep sympathy for the helplessness of the yellow goat in the face of a powerful and cruel wolf, Bilige, the old herdsman, retorted angrily: "In the Mongolian prairie, grass and prairie are the big life, and the rest are small life. Small life depends on big life to survive. Wolves and even human beings are small ones." Billige, as an experienced old herder on the Erlun Prairie, uttered the absolute truth. The lives at the bottom of the ecosystem often play key roles in the entire ecosystem. If the grass gradually disappears on the prairie, then all the creatures on the prairie of Inner Mongolia will not be able to survive. In the concept of elder Bilige, the existence of individual life is very important, but the harmony of the entire prairie ecosystem is more important. There is an inseparable connection between all things, phenomena, links, and elements in the world. The Inner Mongolia prairie is the "big life", and its ecological interests are paramount. Any "small life" on the prairie must respect the "big life", conform to the "big life", and protect the "big life", if the "big life" is gone, "small life" survival is out of the question. In the entire ecosystem of the prairie, species are interconnected, and things are closely linked together. We must examine and reflect on human civilization from the standpoint of the "big life".

Secondly, there is no difference in the existence status of human beings and various creatures in the prairie ecology. The relationship between humans and various creatures in nature is equal and coexisting in symbiosis. The Erlun Prairie is an ecosystem with inherent integrity. The prairie wolf is at the top of the prairie biological chain. Its existence determines the number of marmots, yellow goat, horses and other creatures on the prairie. Moreover, prairie wolves often pose a threat to the production and life of herders. It is precisely because of the existence of this threat that the prairie wolves are full of vitality and vitality, and the entire prairie will show a thriving scene. Now, the prairie wolves are facing

extinction. Although this can bring about a "harmonious" situation, all these seem to be signs of peace, but the actual situation is the opposite. What follows will be a dramatic increase in the population. Driven by the concept of "anthropocentrism", human beings continue to uncontrollably develop the prairie. What follows will only be the degradation of prairie and the expansion of desertification. The ecosystem of the Erlun Prairie will gradually lose its former vitality.

In fact, prairie people are also part of the overall ecology of the prairie. In the "struggle" between the prairie people and the prairie wolves, the entire production activities of the prairie people can maintain an optimal state of balance. If this balance is destroyed, the most basic production activities of the prairie people will not be able to carry out. At the same time, it is precisely in the "struggle" with the prairie wolves that the prairie people will continue to accumulate experience in production activities, improve their labor tools, labor skills and the ability to "fight" the prairie wolves. On the contrary, with the disappearance of the prairie wolf on the prairie, the wild spirit, which is an important support for the spiritual life of the prairie people, will gradually fade with the passage of time.

### **3.3 Respect for the nature of all species**

*Wolf Totem* can produce such a huge response in the literary world, also because the work expresses the awe to the creatures and their nature. The nomads' full understanding and respect for the laws of nature and the nature of each species have ensured the balance of the prairie ecological chain for thousands of years. Especially the awe to the prairie wolf's nature. The author's portrayal of the prairie wolf can be subversive. In the past, the wolf was an evil image. In the novel, the author uniquely made a positive interpretation of the nature of the prairie wolf, such as: smart and wise, full of fighting capacity, love of freedom, full of team spirit...

The wolf clan is full of cleverness and wit. Herders and wolves are fighting with each other every day because of the sheep. Herdsman avoid the hunting of wolves and find a safer place for the sheep; the wolves encircle and suppress the sheep after their own judgment and search. They compete with wisdom and courage. Therefore, although herders and wolves are on the opposite side, they respect and compete with each other on the prairie where they have lived for generations. Herdsman never poison wolves or exterminate wolves because of their harassment. Instead, they take wolves as their teachers and learn from wolves, such as their bravery, their hard work, their fighting spirit and their undefeated will and character. As a nomad of Mongolian tribes, this kind of persevering and indomitable spirit are inseparable from the Wolf. The bloody nature of the wolf tribe gives this nation a lot of encouragement and support, allowing them to fight without fear or panic, but with the confidence and brave perseverance to win.

The Wolf in *Wolf Totem* is free and yearning for the boundless prairie land. Wolves can be raised by people, but they cannot be domesticated. It is not a plaything of man, no matter how good a man treats it, he can't let it run freely, because that is its nature and its mission. For a long time, human beings have had a certain misconception that any animal can be harnessed, domesticated and used by people. In fact, this is wrong. Human beings have lost their awe to the nature of species. Even the little wolf raised by humans from an early age maintains a natural unyielding nature, no matter how much pain he suffers, he must break free from the reins, no matter how good things you give him, he will never give up his freedom. Wolves and humans are equal in nature. We cannot own them as private appendages. We should allow them to live freely in nature. They have a vast world of their own, and they should be given a free home.

As the king of the prairie, the wolf in *Wolf Totem* is also successful in teamwork. Under the leadership of the first wolf, the wolves wait for opportunities and never fight unprepared battles. They have a clear division of action, each perform their duties, and every detail is properly arranged. They are brave, courageous, not afraid to sacrifice their lives, and focus on the interests of the wolves as a whole. This is also a difficult place for the prairie people to conquer. They unite as one and form a wall of friendship. When the foreigners attack, they have no opportunity. When the foreigners do come, they don't just sit back and wait, they are biding their time and that's how they learned to fight with the wolves. Therefore, in the long history of the ups and downs of the Mongolian tribes, there were very few cases of surrendering to the enemy and treason for personal interests, but more of them were killing themselves and sacrificing themselves to help the team.

### **3.4 Look at everything from the perspective of overall ecological benefits**

Ecological ideal and ecological warning are prominent features of many ecological literature works. What should human beings do and change in order to effectively alleviate and finally eliminate the ecological crisis and ensure the continuous existence of ecology and the continuous survival of all life

including human beings?

When expressing the ideal ecological relationship between nature and man, ecological literature attaches special importance to man's responsibility and obligation to nature, and urgently appeals for the protection of all things in nature and the maintenance of ecological balance. In *Wolf Totem*, Jiang Rong also shows a dialectic relationship between human and nature. Herdsman often dig up the carcass of yellow goat hidden by prairie wolves under the ice. They do this to prevent the prairie wolves from eating too much yellow goat. If the number of yellow goats decreases next year, the prairie wolves will also lose food. But the herders cannot completely deprive the prairie wolves of their food. If the wolves lose their food, they will start to attack their herd sheep. Therefore, there is always a belief in the hearts of herdsman: in the contradiction between protection and killing, we should try to keep the balance of the ecosystem. In addition, the author appreciates the prairie people's national spirit. From the prairie wolf, he found the root cause of this kind of national spirit. It is precisely in the frequent struggles with the prairie wolves that the prairie people have a better life. The tough temperament of knowing more about fighting, and being more able to fight, in a sense, the prairie wolf has made the prairie people. On the other hand, in the whole prairie ecosystem, without the presence of prairie people, prairie wolves will over reproduce, and the result will be that all kinds of creatures on the prairie are on the verge of extinction. In this case, prairie wolves cannot survive alone. However, it is precisely because prairie people hunt and kill the wolves appropriately that the number of wolves is reasonably controlled, so that they do not overbreed. In this contradictory and unified relationship between prairie people and wolves, the entire prairie ecosystem can operate in an orderly manner.

Ecological warning is another major theme in many ecological literature works, which issue warnings to human beings again and again: Man is approaching his end, and the end of ecosystems is not far off if we continue to live and produce in the way we do today. In *Wolf Totem*, Jiang Rong uses sharp language to deeply criticize all kinds of unreasonable destruction by human beings. At the same time, he also expresses his infinite yearning for the natural beauty of the original prairie. With the increasingly prominent problems of natural ecological environment, the "ecological holism" reflected in this novel has aroused people's attention to the current ecological problems. The ideal state of the prairie should be flocks of cattle and sheep, grass growing and warbler flying, however, Jiang Rong's description of the present situation of the prairie in the last part of *Wolf Totem* makes this beautiful ideal state fragmented, which also makes more people realize the seriousness of the destruction of the natural ecological environment. As an excellent ecological literary work, the literary value of *Wolf Totem* is to call on human beings to pay more attention to the ecological problems of the prairie, to save the prairie through their own practical actions, to use the power of literature to influence and change the traditional backward ecological concept of "man can conquer nature", and to make people gradually realize the increasingly serious ecological crisis and the urgency and importance of taking measures to protect the ecological environment in the present life.

#### 4. Conclusion

*Wolf Totem* gives us a kind of fear for the fatalistic revenge that nature in turn punishes human beings as a result of man's offending nature. The death of the wolf king, the degeneration of the prairie, and the bleak ending of the little wolf are all painful. The royal family galloping on the grassland disappeared in this way. It is really regrettable. It is conceivable that when they leave the prairie, their lonely back and the sad eyes looking back at the prairie are like a wanderer who is about to leave his hometown, and will be wandering in the future. In addition to the tragedy of the wolf tribe, the desolation of the grassland also makes everyone feel cold on the back. If the ecological balance continues to be destroyed, and desertification begins to spread, then the harmony and stability of the inland will be lost. Faced with the desertification of prairie and forests, where should we go, how should we improve, where should we start, and how should we manage the ecological situation when the ecological problem is not that serious?

The concept of "ecological holism" is in line with today's realistic requirements for building a sustainable and beautiful China. Under the guidance of "ecological holism", we should consciously establish a long-term vision, integrate current scientific decisions with future development, and carefully consider what impact each current decision will have on the future ecological environment in order to achieve harmonious coexistence between man and nature, and return beauty, harmony and tranquility to nature. In his report to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Xi Jinping also pointed out that "Man and nature are a community of life. Mankind must respect nature, comply with nature and protect nature." In *Wolf Totem*, the "ecological holism" advocated by the old herdsman Belige has important practical enlightenment for promoting the construction of ecological civilization in China

in the new era and promoting the harmonious coexistence between man and nature.

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