

Brief Note

The Chinese Dhole



The animal called *ch'ai* 豺 (*Cuon alpinus*) has suffered much from the neglect, ignorance, and indifference of western interpreters of Chinese literature. There is some excuse for this in the texts themselves: he is not a familiar, well-defined creature there. Although he turns up often enough, his indistinct personality defers constantly to the fearful and almost heroic

On Saturday, 9 February 1991, Edward Hetzel Schafer, Agassiz Professor of Oriental Languages and Literature at the University of California, Berkeley, died of liver cancer at his home in Berkeley. He was seventy-seven. Although he had not been feeling well for some months, his final sickness was very short: he taught his last class ten days before his death. Known for his pioneering work in the study of medieval China — its language, literature and culture — Professor Schafer used the poetry and prose of the T'ang dynasty (from the seventh to tenth centuries) to reconstruct the ways that these people of long ago thought, dreamed, and regarded the world around them.

The editors of *Asia Major* feel the loss of his passing deeply. He had contributed much to the revival of this journal. We thank Phyllis Brooks Schafer for her help in publishing the following article.

To perpetuate his memory, a fund has been set up for purchase of books on Classical Chinese for the University of California Library. Contributions may be made to the Schafer Book Fund, the East Asian Library, University of California, Berkeley, 94720.

figures of the lion and the wolf, with whom he is frequently paired. He does not even appear in the wonder tales that present foxes and raccoon-dogs (*li* 狸; *Nyctereutes procyonides*), however depraved, as vivid protagonists. He is a stock image, a shadowy cliché, a crude metaphor, handed down through the ages without modification — since there are few distinct traits to be modified — hardly different in the verses of Tu Fu than he is in the vivid narratives of the *Tso chuan*.

Worst of all, western translators, old and new, have treated him with undeserved contempt. First of all, they have scorned the small effort needed to determine his identity, so that his name persists as an empty vocable. Or else they have assimilated his identity to that of some completely different beast, which may not even exist in the Far East. For Waley, he evaporates, and the whole Chinese phrase *lang yü ch'ai* 狼與豺 is reduced to "wolves."¹ For Legge, he is coupled with the tiger, but becomes a wolf himself (*ch'ai hu* 豺虎), rendered "wolves and tigers."² But elsewhere Legge makes him half a wolf, or an ingredient in wolfness: *ch'ai lang* 豺狼, properly "ch'ai and wolves," becomes merely a bisyllabic wolf.³

Some more modern translators update the error and confusion by depriving the dhole of his nationality or ethnicity. For Hawkes, he is a displaced jackal, a wanderer from a dream of the Serengeti.⁴ Lois Fusek not only adopts this fancy, but in the same clause converts the bovine gaur (*ssu* 兕; *Bibos gaurus*) into a rhinoceros — but this error is so old as to have acquired an aura of classic dignity.⁵

For a credible definition of *ch'ai*, we look first for clues among the paronomastic etymologies supplied by old Chinese writers, following a respectable tradition. Tuan Ch'eng-shih 段成式, the T'ang bibliophile, has suggested one in the guise of a folk-taboo: "Hunters will not kill a *ch'ai* (**drai*) since it has the same sound as **dzai* 財, wealth."⁶ Wang An-shih 王安石 prefers to connect the name with **dzai* 才 "talent," on the grounds that the *ch'ai* is dominant among its kind, and also performs ritual offerings to higher beings.⁷ Another Sung source offers *ch'ai* (**drai* 柴 "kindling wood;

stick) as etymon, because the animal *ch'ai* is as skinny as a stick, and emaciated or lean people are for this reason called *ch'ai*.⁸ The last is the only persuasive proposal among these, but may not be provable. Traditional glosses on the word *ch'ai* add very little to our understanding: *Erh ya* 爾雅 observes that *ch'ai* are "dog-legged." *Shuo wen* 說文 states that the *ch'ai* is related to the wolf, and has the cry of a dog. In short, *ch'ai* appears to be a canid, but neither dog nor wolf. It is rather a dhole — sometimes called "red dog," "whistling dog," "wild dog," and other such descriptive names. The etymology of this word is not known, although Canarese *tôla* "wolf" has been proposed.⁹ The earliest record of the word is dated 1827. Several early occurrences note the similarity of the dhole to the dingo, and a source of 1866 reports the alternate name — source not stated — of "kholson."¹⁰

Dholes are distinguished from wolves, jackals, and the like by their dentition. For the casual observer the difference lies rather in its rounded ears and reddish color, although a yellowish brown color is reported in some individuals. It lives in burrows and hunts its prey in packs. It does not lack authority, as Chinese sources note, and has been seen to drive even a leopard from its kill.¹¹ Li Shih-chen 李時珍, writing in the sixteenth century, affirms that when traveling in packs even tigers fear it.¹² A modern observer styles it "highly intelligent, wary of man, and an elusive predator . . . a rare and beautiful creature."¹³

Human contact with dholes is necessarily slight, as both prefer. The physical dhole — as distinguished from the legendary and literary dhole — played only a small part in Chinese pharmacology. Meng Shen 孟詵 (seventh century) reports that, although eating its flesh damages spirit and sperm and causes emaciation in humans, it can be given to horses and cattle in a potion to make them docile.¹⁴

The dhole occurred in China during the Pleistocene, and reached Europe in the Last Interglacial, but it is now an endangered species in a shrink-

kang mu 本草綱目 (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1972), ch. 51, p. 51. Cf. [T'ang] Chung Tsung 中宗, "Pai nan chiao chih" 拜南郊制, *Ch'uan Tang wen* 全唐文 16, p. 8b, which recognizes the affinity between the offerings of the dholes and the court sacrifices to celestial divinities.

⁸ Lu Tien 陸佃 (1042-1102), *P'ia* 埤雅 (Ts'ung shu chi ch'eng edn.) 3, p. 64.

⁹ *Oxford English Dictionary*. ¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ G. H. H. Tate, *Mammals of Eastern Asia* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), p. 161. See this source for data on the distribution of subspecies.

¹² Li, *Pen ts'ao*, 51, p. 52.

¹³ This appraisal comes from Michael W. Fox, *The Whistling Hunters: Field Studies of the Asiatic Wild Dog (Cuon alpinus)* (Albany: State U. of New York P., 1984), p. vii. Fox did field research in the Nilgiri Hills of India.

¹⁴ Quoted in Li, *Pen ts'ao*, 51, p. 52.

¹ Li Po 李白, "Shu tao nan" 蜀道難, trans. A. Waley, *The Poetry and Career of Li Po (701-762 A.D.)* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1950), p. 40.

² *Shih ching*, "Hsiao ya" 小雅, "Hsiao po 巷伯." See James Legge, *The She King*, vol. 4 of *The Chinese Classics* (rpt. Hong Kong: Hong Kong U.P., 1960), part 2, book 5, p. 348.

³ *Meng tzu*, "Li lou 離婁" A. See Legge, *The Works of Mencius*, vol. 2 of *The Chinese Classics*, book 4, part 1, p. 307.

⁴ David Hawkes, *Ch'u tz'u: The Songs of the South* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 111.

⁵ Fusek, "The Kao-t'ang fu," *MS* 30 (1972-1973), pp. 392-425.

⁶ Tuan Ch'eng-shih, *Yu yang tsa tsu* 酉陽雜俎, *hsii chi* 續集 (Ts'ung shu chi ch'eng edn.) 8, p. 239.

⁷ Wang An-shih (1021-1086), *Tzu shuo* 字說, quoted in Li Shih-chen 李時珍, *Pen ts'ao*

ing habitat. Races of the animal now occur throughout southeast and south Asia as well as in Central Asia and Siberia. It seems to have been extinguished in northeast China.¹⁵

In early literature and classical lore the personality of the dhole is shadowy at best, and it is most always displayed as a kind of parasite on other carnivorous animals—especially the largest and most stalwart of them. At the head of the list is the tiger, and the pages of literature are abundantly populated with the fearful pairing of “dholes and tigers” (*ch'ai hu*). The dhole's nature, it seems, is invigorated and fleshed out by the propinquity of the tiger. Both are fierce creatures, but the dhole's natural reticence does not allow that its savagery be fully revealed except when reinforced by the commanding presence of the tiger. So it is also with the association “dholes and wolves” (*ch'ai lang*), probably the most common of these doublets.¹⁶

In all occurrences, the two predatory carnivores typify cruelty and brutishness, and often represent malignant men. Both are at variance with such numinous beasts of good omen as the *ch'i lin* 麒麟.¹⁷ *Pao p'u tzu* 抱朴子 tells that “when dholes and wolves are on the road the *ch'i-lin* goes far away,”¹⁸ and again: “[*ch'i*]-*lin* and [*tsou*]-*yü* 騶虞 do not join the bands of dholes and wolves.”¹⁹

Less commonly, dholes are associated with otters—both were thought to make offerings of their kills (see below).²⁰ They are also linked with ferret-badgers (*Helictis moschata*: *ho*, **ghak* 貉), small omnivores with long pointed

noses, resident in the south;²¹ with wild pigs; and, apparently, with giant pandas.²² All of these doublets apparently have metaphoric applications. All point to wild animals of which one should be wary. “Dholes and tigers” regularly represent cruel and heartless men; so do “dholes and wolves,” with the added image of working in packs; “dholes and otters,” though fierce, know the rudiments of civilized behavior: “dholes and boars” are vicious and dangerous; “dholes and ferret-badgers” and “dholes and giant pandas” seem only to symbolize social disorder and insensate behavior. But some subtle mind may yet discover more precise referents for these clusters of images.

Most often the dhole represents a type, not an individual. It is common in old maxims: for instance, “When dholes and wolves are at the pen, goats are not abundant there.”²³ The allusion is general not specific, and all sorts of oppressive officials will fill the bill. Another example: “When dholes and wolves are on the road, who cares about foxes and raccoon-dogs?”²⁴ That is, one can ignore petty scoundrels when powerful men threaten harm. The metaphor applies also to persons who, even if not actually injurious, are able and well-informed, but are not governed by honor and decency: “. . . if he is neither trustworthy nor prudent, he is comparable to a dhole or a wolf.”²⁵

Among the dhole-like enemies of civilized men were the tribes along the northern frontier. Here are the words of the late-T'ang poet Ch'en T'ao 陳陶:

Looking over the lake at a battle below the frontier barrier —
The several caitiff peoples have lost their whole host.
Birds peck at commanders of dholes and wolves,
Sand buries the banners of sun and moon;
Their oxen and sheep run off to the Red Ti,
Their settlements are distributed among the veterans of Yen,
The Convoker-Guardian comes out, skimming the dawn;
He makes the epitaphs for their exploits; he inhumes the corpses of the
dead.²⁶

¹⁵ Li Po, “Ta lieh fu” 大獵賦, *Ch'uan T'ang wen* 347, p. 9a.

²² *Ch'ai mo* (**mák*) 豺獏. The doublet can be found in Tso Ssu 左思, “Wu tu fu” 吳都賦; see his *Tso T'ai-ch'ung chi* 左太冲集 in *Han Wei Liu ch'ao ming chia chi* 漢魏六朝名家集 (Shanghai, 1911), p. 6b. The identification of **mo* as “giant panda” is owed to the work of Donald Harper, whose findings should appear in print soon.

²³ *Han Fei tzu* 韓非子, “Yang ch'uan 揚權.”

²⁴ *Hou Han shu* 86, p. 0820d. ²⁵ *Hsin tzu*, “Ai kung p'ien 哀公篇.”

²⁶ Ch'en T'ao, “Sai hsia ch'ü” 塞下曲, *Ch'uan T'ang shih* 全唐詩, *han* 11, *ts'e* 4, *ch.* 1, p. 1a. The “caitiffs” of l. 2 are *lo* 虜 “[potential] captives,” said of the northern nomads. The birds of l. 3 are probably ravens; the wolves and dholes are the foreign warriors. In l. 4 the

¹⁵ Fox, *Whistling Hunters*, pp. 40-41; F. E. Zeuner, *A History of Domesticated Animals* (London: Hutchinson, 1963), p. 106.

¹⁶ For many years I used the expression “pleonasm” in my classes in Literary Chinese to represent pairs of monosyllabic words of the type *wan k'uang* 元礦 “crude and coarse” (of rough-textured rock), *jung chieh* 融結 “fused and knotted” (for any sort of melting together), or *ying hu* 鷹鵟 “goshawk and falcon” (for hunting hawks collectively). Long dissatisfied with the use of “pleonasm,” with its implication of redundancy, for this purpose, I recently suggested the use of “synonym pair,” as used in Laurence C. Thompson, *A Vietnamese Grammar* (Seattle: U. of Washington P., 1965), p. 131, as follows: “A special kind of correlative pair, sometimes called ‘synonym pair,’ consists of two monosyllabic words which, although not true synonyms, are members of a semantic class. The class is represented by the pair (cf. English ‘pots and pans’ for the class of cooking containers). An example is 豺狼 ‘dholes and wolves’ for the whole class of wild canids.” See E. H. Schafer, “Notes on Translating T'ang Poetry. Part One: Words,” *Schafer Sinological Papers* 29 (Berkeley, 6 August 1985), p. 5. This seemed just as unsatisfactory as “pleonasm,” and I finally proposed to abandon it for the term “synecdochic pair,” which implies that each element of the pair is a member of the class which they jointly denote.

¹⁷ In late literature stereotyped as “unicorn”—but a horn was not originally typical of this divine horse: the horned creature which appeared in the garden of Han Wu Ti was a prodigy, unique among its kind. Later lore froze this mutation into a prototype.

¹⁸ *Pao p'u tzu* (*T'ao tsang*, HY 1177), *wai p'ien*, “Shen chü 審舉.”

¹⁹ *Pao p'u tzu*, “Chiao chi 交際.”

²⁰ *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (K'ai ming edn.) 17, p. 0678c.

Occasionally, however, we encounter a particular person who is described as a dhole. The founder of the great Ch'in nation, Ying Cheng 嬴政, displayed his character in his physical attributes. He was endowed with a "bee's nose" (that is, a high-bridged nose), long narrow eyes, and the breast bone of a bird of prey; he had "the cry of a dhole and the heart of a tiger or wolf—with little mercy."²⁷

The most commented on bit of dhole lore inherited from antiquity concerns their supposed sacrifice of animals as offerings to obscure divinities. In its pristine form the tradition is that the wild dogs lay out part of their kill in the late autumn, and that this was regarded as a signal for the great royal hunting season to begin.²⁸ The origin of this belief may lie in the fact that dholes rarely take uneaten portions of their prey back to their dens. They leave it at the site of the kill, where it can be scavenged by other carnivores.²⁹

Dholes are equipped with a rich variety of calls and cries. Some have been described as "whine," "whimper," "growl," "bark," "scream," "chatter," "whistle," "cackle," and "yapping howls." The whistling, for which the dhole is sometimes named, is a way of arranging contacts or assemblies.³⁰ Parts of this rich vocabulary, at least, seemed unpleasant or threatening to men. One T'ang authority says that southerners take it to be ill-omened when a dhole "makes a sound at them,"³¹ but whether this evil sound was a whine or a whistle is not specified.

Li Shih-chen writes, "Its cry is like a dog's; men dislike it, saying that it summons goblins (*mei* 魅)." On top of that it emits a foul odor.³² It was said in ancient times that human beings with a dhole's voice were as murderous as dholes, and such persons should be killed before they themselves kill.³³ There were, in addition to men with the attributes of dholes, men who were transformed into real dholes. *Pao p'u tzu* tells of such were-dholes—dholes, which like foxes, raccoon-dogs, and wolves, could assume the human form when they attained the age of 500 years.³⁴

banners are royal banners. The Red Ti (I. 5) hold the uplands on the Shansi border. Finally (I. 7), the "Convoker-Guardian" (*tu-hu* 都護) is the regional military inspector, and "skimming the dawn" (*ling ch'en* 凌晨) means "with the first flush of dawn."

²⁷ *Shih chi* 史記 (K'ai ming edn.), 6, p. 0023d.

²⁸ *Li chi* 禮記, "Yüeh ling 月令," and "Wang chih 王制"; and *Chi chung Chou shu* 汲冢周書, "Shih hsin chieh 時訓解." Later (Sung) attempts to explain this persistent bit of the *ju*-ist tradition may be perused in Lu, *P'i ya* 3, pp. 64-65, and Lo Yüan 羅願 (1136-1184), *Erh ya i* 爾雅翼 (Ts'ung shu chi ch'eng edn.) 19, pp. 210-11.

²⁹ Fox, *Whistling Hunters*, pp. 73-74.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

³¹ Tuan, *Yu yang tsu tsu*, *hsü chi* 8, p. 239.

³² Li, *Pen ts'ao* 51, p. 52.

³³ *Tso chuan* (Hsüan 4). Legge, as was customary, omits the dhole in his translations: "the voice of a wolf" suffices for *ch'ai lang chih sheng* 豺狼之聲. See Legge, *The Ch'un Ts'ew with the Tso Chuen*, vol 5, of *The Chinese Classics*, book 7, p. 296.

³⁴ *Pao p'u tzu*, *nei p'ien* 3, p. 3a.