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Interpellation Mechanism In Jian Rong's *Wolf Totem*

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the concept of ideology through the lens of Louis Althusser's theories, particularly interpellation, experienced by Chen Zen in Jiang Rong's Wolf Totem. The purpose of this research is to go beyond oversimplified ideas of false consciousness and investigate how ideology essentially influences people's worldviews, directs group behaviour, and pervades every facet of human existence, from government system to personal identities.

The research was carried out using descriptive qualitative method. It meticulously analyzes the novel *Wolf Totem* by Jiang Rong to demonstrate Althusser's concepts in practice. The results and discussion focus on how the protagonist, Chen Zhen, a Han Chinese student in Inner Mongolia, experiences a profound ideological shifting. Through his engagement in Mongolian culture and his observations of wolves, Chen's previous "tired and weary" identity is gradually replaced by a new perspective, symbolizing the "wolf's blood" flowing in his blood. This shift is an example of the unconscious process of interpellation, in which people are "hailed" into particular subject positions, which eventually serves to either support or undermine pre-existing social structures.

In conclusion, the paper demonstrates how *Wolf Totem* vividly illustrates the dynamic interaction between state-imposed ideology and alternative cultural ideologies, revealing how they shape identities, worldviews, and social relations. This analysis ultimately advances our knowledge of conflict and collaboration in a complex world.

Keywords: interpellation, ideology, subject

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INTRODUCTION

Amid the shifting and divisive global political and social movement, understanding ideology has significantly grown more important and vital. There is an existence of fundamental ideological differences at the root of social movements and conflicts because ideology becomes a prism of people and organization on how they conceive the world and promote their ideal society.

Functioning to shape the worldviews and guide the individuals also groups' action, ideology as a set of ideas, values, beliefs and norms is fundamental in understanding social, political and cultural dynamics. Furthermore, ideology also permeates various aspects of human life; government systems, public policies, daily practices and identity formation.

Literary work is a medium to express author's or a certain era's most dominant ideology. One of literary works that discusses about the ideological conflict is Wolf Totem by Jiang Rong. *Wolf Totem* (2008), written by Jiang Rong, is a semi-autobiographical novel set during China's Cultural

Revolution, and explores the ideological conflict between the nomadic Mongolian culture and the dominant Han Chinese Communist ideology.
The story follows Chen Zhen, a young intelligent boy who is sent to Inner Mongolia for learning craft. There, he becomes fascinated by the wolves and the lifestyle of the Mongolian shepherd, who live in harmony with nature and hold deep respect for the wolf totem as a symbol of strength, freedom, and survival.
The novel is interesting to analyse as it contrasts the national Ideology, which emphasizes collectivism, control, and human domination over nature, with the Mongolian nomadic ideology, which values individualism, balance with the environment, and reverence for the wolf's fierce spirit. The wolves represent a natural order and a harsh but fair survivalist ethic that the Communist regime attempts to suppress through policies that lead to environmental degradation and cultural erasure. Ultimately, *Wolf Totem* critiques the ideological rigidity of Maoist Communism and suggests that the Chinese people could benefit from embracing the wolf-like qualities of courage, independence, and adaptability. Through this ideological lens, the novel becomes a meditation on how political systems can either destroy or preserve cultural and ecological wisdom.

In analysing the topic, Lois's Althusser's interpellation theory was employed. Louis Althusser, offers a more complex and structural understanding concept of ideology rather than simply a set of false ideas or a deliberate manipulation by a ruling class(Althusser, 2020). Focusing on the idea of *interpellation* and *Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs),* his theories on ideology have made a substantial contribution to the comprehension on how ideology functions in society. Moreover, he proposes a more structural and material view about how ideology reproduces social order and determines subjects rather than only viewing it as false consciousness. His significant contribution lies in the shift from understanding ideology as a mere *false consciousness* that is consciously indoctrinated by the ruling class to a more material and structural perspective. This idea was published in his essay entitled *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)* (Althusser, 2024). Althusser's idea revolutionized the study about how power and domination are reproduced in society. He highlighted how ideology was manifested in the real practices, rituals and institutions which shape everyday life.

In terms of previous researches, there have been other studies focusing on Wolf Totem. The first study is an article entitled "The Wolf Myth and Chinese Environmental Sentimentalism in "Wolf Totem" (He, 2014) written by Chengzhou He. The research uncovers the intersection between sentimental and environmental ethics, the so-called environmental-sentimentalism depicted in the Wolf Totem novel.
Another previous research is an article entitled "Indeterminacy and Concretization: Analysis of Howard Goldblatt's English Translation of Wolf Totem" (Pei & Si-qi, 2017)written by ZHANG Pei and MA Si-qi. It discussed the Indeterminacy and Concretization strategy done by Howard Goldblatt in translating the novel from Chinese to English.
The next previous study is an article entitled "Wolves and Wolf Men as Literary Tropes and Figures of Thought: Jiang Rong's Wolf Totem and other Wolf Narratives in Ecopoetic and Zoopoetic Perspective" written by Axel Goodbody (Goodbody, 2019). In his article, Goodbody described a symbol of wolf and wolf men which reflects a tradition of narratives in which wolves and wolf men serve as figures of thought conveying ambiguous social and political messages.
Those previous researches uncover several aspects of the novel such as environmental-sentimentalism, translation strategy, and wolf symbolism. The present research adds the research gap by providing another insight in cultivating the novel. It applied Athusser's Interpellation and ISA concept to discussed the main character's ideology portrayed in the Wolf Totem novel.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study employs the Marxist theoretical perspective developed by Louis Althusser, particularly his concepts of **interpellation** and **Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs)**, as outlined in his seminal essay *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (1970/2014)(Althusser, 2010). Althusser

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1**. Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs)**

According to Althusser (1970/2014), the state maintains its power not only through Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs)—which include the police, army, and legal system—but also through Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs)**.** ISAs consist of institutions such as the educational system, religion, the family, media, and cultural institutions, which operate primarily through ideology rather than force. These apparatuses serve the interests of the ruling class by reproducing the conditions necessary for the functioning of the capitalist system. Education, in particular, plays a central role in shaping individuals to accept the values and expectations of the dominant ideology (Althusser, 2014).

Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA's), which differs from Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA's), functions primarily through ideology including family, religion, education system, media and cultural system (Althusser, 2012). Through the interpellation concept, ideology shapes individuals into subjects who recognize themselves both in categories and their roles which are predetermined by certain dominant social order. This process is subtle and occurs through hailed subject. When an individual is interpellated, they are hailed as a subject within a specific discourse (Montag, 2017). For example, when a teacher probably hails a student as a "good student" or a "troublemaker," it shapes their identity within the educational system. In response to that hail, if an individual accepts and recognizes that call as the called party, it can be determined that the interpellation process is successful.

2. Interpellation: The Making of Subjects

Central to Althusser's theory is the process of interpellation, through which ideology "hails" individuals and transforms them into subjects. This process occurs when individuals recognize themselves in ideological discourses and thus internalize their positions within a social hierarchy (Althusser, 2014). For instance, when an individual respond to a social role (e.g., student, citizen, worker), they accept and enact the expectations associated with that identity. In literary and cultural analysis, this theory helps explain how texts and narratives position readers and characters within specific ideological frameworks.

The majority of the interpellation process operates subconsciously (Kukla, 2018). People frequently do not realize how ideology influences their identity or that they are interpellated. It perceives as a natural process. In reality, ideological interpellation is largely responsible for the identity we consider to be "ourselves." As a result, ideology reproduces the current social order through interpellation. People who have been forced into particular roles, such as employees, capital owners, or compliant citizens. They tend to behave and think in ways that support the demands of their roles, which helps to maintain the status quo. The purpose of this article is to examine ideology in detail, looking at its many definitions, social roles, and effects on historical development and social interaction. Analysing the forces that shape our world and determining the causes of conflict and collaboration require an understanding of ideology.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Since this research emphasizes on the understanding of the meaning, context and complexity of a literary work, it employs descriptive qualitative methods. This method aims to describe and interpret literary phenomena in a deep and comprehensive manner, without focusing on numerical measurement or statistical generalization (Smeyers, 2008). In addition, this method analyzes a literary work as a complex and interrelated one. There are various elements in the literary work that

interact and contribute to the meaning as a whole. They include intrinsic elements, such as theme, plot, setting, language style and also extrinsic elements such as culture, author's history and social context.

There are steps in literary descriptive qualitative method (Furidha, 2023) namely determining the research focus by identifying a specific aspect on a certain literary work to be studied, collecting data which includes main data and supporting data, analyzing data by analyzing and paying attention to details of the narrative structure, identifying and labelling the part of the literary work that are relevant to the research focus, developing a comprehension and explanation of the meaning found in the literary work and lastly presenting the result.

RESULTS

Chen Zhen, a Han Chinese student, is assigned to Olonbulag. It is a vast grassland in the inner of Mongolia. He is sent to live among the Mongolian shepherds to teach them Chinese culture. Not only does he teach the shepherds, but he gains something even greater, the life of the wolves who are highly respected by the shepherds. As he watchs wolves roaming the fields, he observes that they seem to possess an almost human-like intelligence and a strong spiritual identity. He listens to the stories the Mongols told of their struggles and joys and learns the secrets of the grasslands from them. Chen's curiosity is so great that he captures and raises a wolf cub. However, he realizes that his actions offend most of the shepherds, and he is considered an outsider who does not appreciate the grassland culture.

An arrogant and ruthless party official, Bao Shungui comes to Mongolia to implement the party's radical policy of exterminating the native wolf population. His troops immediately begin driving the wolves out of the region, killing countless numbers. This is the beginning of a survival stage as the ancient world clashes with a modern ideology bent on its destruction. Humans are at war with the animals that are here long before them.

Analyzing the employment of interpellation concepts in this novel provides a fascinating point of view to comprehend how an ideology performs in shaping a certain identity. Moreover, this novel also offers the relationship between individuals and society.

The first interpellation concept appears in the identity of Shepherd Han when Bilgee said:

> *"You need more courage than that. You're like a sheep. The fear of wolves is in your Chinese bones. That's the only explanation why you've never won a battle here."* (Rong, 2008)

This expression implies that fear is deeply rooted and inherited by Chen as the representative of Chinese Han's identity. It is more than an individual shortcoming. It also depicts the Chinese Han's cultural and historical identity that makes them afraid of the wild and conflict.

The Chinese Han's dynamic power over nature appears in:

> "*What should have been a tense battle between humans and wolves was now nothing more than entertainment for humans. It was the first time since his arrival to the grassland that Chen saw the vast superiority of humans over wolves. The Mongolian wolves that had dominated the grasslands for thousands of years were now more pathetic than rabbits."* (Rong, 2008)

This marks a significant shift in Chen's viewpoint. Chen, who had been influenced by the Mongols, has a great deal of respect for the wolves' strength, cunning, and capacity to rule the hostile environment up until this point. He believes that wolves and humans are fighting a harder, but more equal, battle for survival. This observation, however, dispels that belief. It exposes a harsh reality: humans have a vast, nearly unjust advantage of their organized methods (such as mass extermination campaigns) and technology (such as guns and automobiles). Instead of being presented as something positive, this "superiority" is a testament to humanity's ability to dominate and destroy, even against once-invincible creatures.

As his interaction with the Mongolian, its ideological call, the culture which deeply respects and fascinates the wolf grows in Chen's identity.

> *"But they escape regularly, maintaining the ancient pack formations and organizational unity typical of the prairie wolf: The fiercest members act as the vanguard, with the main male leading at the front, with*

> *the main male leading at the front, the larger wolves in the pack close behind. There is never any confusion as is common with birds and other wild animals that run away. Chen was mesmerized by the sight."* (Rong, 2008)

The Han Chinese consider wolves to be savage, barbaric and unruly. In addition, according to Chinese Han, wolves are voracious and cruel animals that must be controlled. However, with what he saw, Han understood that wolves are animals that have discipline, order, intelligence and unity as seen in a master strategy.

Chen's acceptance of this ideology is represented when he wants to take care of a wolf cub:

> "*An idea that was never far from Chen's mind had become stronger in recent days; he was determined to get a wolf cub and take care of it in his tent, watching day and night as the animal grew up, hoping that the closeness would lead to a deeper understanding."* (Rong, 2008)

The statement emphasizes that Chen's obsession with learning everything there is to know about wolves is a continuous and growing one rather than an impulse. This implies that he has been greatly impacted by his prior observations of wild wolves and his encounters with the Mongols' views on them. The concept has evolved from a passing notion to a tangible goal.

Chen's acceptance of wolfology still continues as the interpellation process is not instant, but it takes a long and iterative time. (Dolar, M. (1993). Beyond interpellation. *Qui parle*, 75-96.) as seen in this passage:

> *"Since being captivated by the steppe wolf, Chen felt that his tired and weary blood had become weaker and weaker and that the strange wolf's blood seemed to flow in his veins. His outlook on life had changed—he guarded it carefully even as it became stronger and more satisfying."* (Rong, 2008)

Chen's blood transfusion symbol from 'tired and weary' is a metaphor of his previous identity. However, that condition becomes weaker as his former identity declines. On the other hand, 'the wolf's blood seemed to flow in his veins' symbolizes that the wolf's character has been internalized into him; strong, free, sharp instincts and independence. As a result, he has a new and different point of view about the world and how it works also appreciates the Mongol culture and the balance of nature and culture.

CONCLUSION

Interpellation is Althusser's core process of internalizing a certain ideology. It elaborates about how an ideology does not simply exist as an abstract idea, but it works actively shaping an individual into a subject in the existing social order.

People respond to ideological calls without realizing it, which allows the social structure to continue existing. Through its various story components, the book Wolf Totem offers a thorough illustration of interpellation. The book illustrates how individuals (Chen Zhen) undergo interpellation from diverse cultural concepts, leading to alterations in their sense of self. The book's plot illustrates how the Mongol community fights against the government's attempts to force an identity on them. By presenting Chen Zhen's contacts with Mongol society and nature alongside state ideology, Wolf Totem investigates how ideology shapes worldviews, identities, and social relations.

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