

NORTHERN TIGERS, FLAGSHIP OF A PLURICONTINENTAL CIVILIZATION

1. Anger and extermination

Since the beginning of years 2000, siberian tigers are pushed quickly to extinction. Destruction of forest and wild preys, wild animals illegal trade, anger of villagers confronted to the loss of their dogs and cattles.

Several documentaries has well shown this phenomenons, the most famous and explicite realized by the « Scandinature » society, untitled : « the last roar of tiger » that puts in light apocalyptic relationships between two mammals equally determined to survive by all means. Moreover, climatic disasters had aggravated the situation (several times since 2001). For June 2007, 5 female tigers were killed and 3 of their cubs have been taken by wood cutters.

During the same month, Carré illness has made its apparition (one male in a city). The consequences may be quickly letal for the last wild siberian tigers, that are confronted now to extinction for the third time in less than a century.

There is no more than a few dizains of survivors (same situation as this of 1930). Official numbers (unhappily cautionned by WWF) are only published to hide the real situation (as it was the case in India up to August 2007).

After the extermination, during the twentieth century, of caspian tigers from meridional zones of Russia (with many more individuals than siberian tigers), are we going to see the remake of an indescriptible crime ?

History shows, on the contrary, imagination linked to determination can be stonishingly efficient.

Northern tigers have already been in similar situations in the past.

Non conventional methods adaptated to the context have each time saved them.

Despite this, northern tigers are condemned for the next months. It would be comparable to the cave lion extinction at the end of upper Pleistocene.

2. A glorious past, from Yellow River to Liakhov Islands, from Baïkal to Alaska

In the mid and upper Pleistocene, distribution of siberian tigers was huge. They were both circum – arctic (Liakhov Islands, 72 degrees of latitude, and beringian (attested presence in Alaska 100 000 years ago according to studies of Sandra Herrington (Turner and Anton 1997)). They were probably present in Kamtchatka. They could have the northest distributions during interglacial periods*.

In the upper Pleistocene, hybrid communities men/tigers have perhaps been more numerous than those of historical India, because concerning wider areas on three continents.

In the Holocene, northern tigers reigned on a huge territory, from banks of Yellow River to Transbaïkalia for one part, Sakhaline for the other part. Expulsed very early from northern China, they can thus prosperate on other areas at least up to 16th century.

Severely destroyed by wood runners of Catherine the Great, they benefit of a new eastern golden age, in northern China. Mandchourian authorities forbid the exploitation of the region by chinese settlers and tigers could be seen again on Yellow River banks.

3. A recent conflagration : 1880 – 1930

Situation became harder from all sides in this period. Anarchy and peasants rebellions in

China were funest for the big predator. Moreover, oriental Russia submitted an ecological rupture comparable to this occurring with white colonization of North America. Conflicts grew up to an insupportable level. Animals frequently act as predators inside cities. 150 of them were killed each year.

Russian naturalists Nicolas Baïkov and Vladimir Arseniev who has written famous books on siberian taïga at this epoch show a world in crisis, where harmony between humans and animals belongs to the past.

In Korea, Japanese occupying troops took their guns to inhabitants. Tigers attack them until into their houses, and awful stories fly throughtout the country, particularly those of monstrous tigers with surnatural powers and bizarre physiological peculiarities.

Korean people put fire on their mountainous forests that were revered up to that time and radically overthrow the ecology of their country to escape to the constant tiger threat.

Dersou Ouzala, emblematic guide of V.Arseniev, lives personally the drama of siberian nature. Disgusted by hunting practices of russian officers of Vladivostok basis as well as massive poaching by chinese people, he said that « it stays only rats, dogs and crows ». He falls in panic fear after killing a tiger, and flees from the taïga where he has always lived. He goes to Khabarovsk to escape to forest spirits, where he is killed .

At the beginning of 1930 years giant tigers were no more than 30, which is quite similar to the present situation.

4. Saving siberian tiger cultures

Soviet authorities officially decide to save both caspian and siberian tigers.

The first are officially protected in a specially created national Park, among reeds, willows and poplars in Tadjikistan ; « Tigrovaya Balka ». But the lack of true political will to viabilize such an experiment strenghtens the final extinction of *Panthera tigris virgata* on Russian territory.

For Siberian tigers, an energetic policy of effective protection had spectacular results : on an immense area of 150 000 km², tiger numbers progressively increase up to 800 at the beginning of 1980 years. But following years (1985 – 1995) are marked by political troubles and a tremendous new crunch in tiger populations (90 individuals poached every year). Anti poaching motivated brigades, politically sustained by russian authorities and financially by international associations, obtain (at least in a first time) significative results between 1995 and 2000 : it's Amba operation, that save siberian tigers for the second time in the twentieth century. For local people, Amba the tiger is the soul of the forest. A taïga without any tiger no more exists.

But the recent years were more sad, as it has been seen higher.

Today, Tunguse people continue to consider « Amba » as a parent. They think their fates are linked . They cry the death of « brother tiger » and exploitation of their territory. They know that if tiger dies, they will also go to death.

Extermination of a big predator always induces the destruction of one or several cultures strongly correlated to his presence. It strenghtens people to misery, slavery and dishope.

Most of numerous projects financed by WWF (at least 6 for the first half of 2007) have no result. Some of them are theoretically interesting : forest and wild preys protection, resolution of conflicts humans/tigers, support for infrastructures of national parks « Zov Tigra » and « Udege Legend », translocation of tigers in securized zones, realization of natural corridors from russian territories to Changbaishan and Wandashan chinese mountains to ensure survival of Amur tigers in China, conjugated policies of the two countries. But will acts and results follow the communication ?

As present situation is particularly dramatic, a call to russian public opinion by popular and

deeply respected russian personalities is of course necessary thus not sufficient.
Moreover, distribution of northern tigers must be changed.

5. AMERICAN AND JAPANESE SANCTUARIES

SIBERIAN CULTURE, CLIMATIC CHANGE AND EURAMERICAN CIRCUM – ARCTIC ZONES

Traditional siberian cultures, which were dominant in septentrional Eurasia in upper Pleistocene had an enormous influence on Northern China, political matrix of this country, and so on Chinese civilization as a whole.

Furthermore, as it has been shown by Alain Testart (1982) and Tim Flannery (2001), siberian culture concerned not only Korea and Japan, but was also the matrix for pioneers who invade America through frozen Beringia bridge 12500 years ago.

Alain Testart shows that cultural basis are the same for Goldes, Udeges, Ainous, Aleouts, North western indians and californian civilization.

Still today, giant tiger is sacred for Golde and Udeges.

Northern tigers have natural and historical vocation to come back in some areas from Baikal to Alaska.

A key element is the capacity of revival for tiger culture for all communities of siberian californian bow. Another one is the present and future climatic change who could include occidental circum – arctic areas of euro – american taïga and perhaps also baltic and scandinavian territories.

Siberian tigers have, in any way, already been included in long term projects in oriental Yakoutia (Pr Sergueï Zimov works on a mammoth landscape reconstitution since 1989) as well as North America (Josh Dolan of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology tempts to rebuild prehistoric areas occupied by lions and asian elephants).

POTENTIAL IMPLANTATION IN HOKKAÏDO

Mountains of Hokkaïdo (Northern Japan) are not far from Sikhote Aline, where last wild siberian tigers presently survive (a few hundred of kilometers).

They could be a refuge for a familial nucleus of these animals.

Tigers have been present in Japan in the far past (*Panthera tigris japonensis*, like all island tigers, was smaller than continental tigers). He has probably disappeared of the archipelago since the Holocene (P. Matthiessen 1999, Picq and Savigny 2004).

Protected during 12 000 years by inhabitants culture, the mountains stay sacred until today and there is no heavy urbanistic structure on them in Japan, that is the developed country with best preserved wild areas. Hokkaïdo mountains are very similar to those of Sikhote Aline. Moreover, if necessary, naturalists know how to prepare an area before it will host a big exogenic animal, as it has been the case in translocations of wolves inside Yellowstone park in USA, or Prezwalsky horses in Mongolia and occidental China, as well as it is also programed for lions in West India.

So, japanese naturalists could be truly interested by such a potentiality.

Japanese naturalist sensibility is present in artistic realizations, particularly cinematographic ones like « Dersou Ouzala » by Akira Kurosawa, 1975, adapted from the Arseniev book, where Amba, spirit of forest, is illustrated through the siberian tiger, « the Narayama journey » 1984, with the sacred mountain as first character, and the famous manga « Mononoke Princess » 1997, of Hayao Miyazaki, where the forest is protected by giant animals.

The author could be interested in the public illustration for a program of tiger implantation in northern Japan.

RUSSIA AT THE CROSSROADS OF WAYS

As a whole species, the two golden ages of tiger were primarily Russian ages.

40000 years ago, density of these animals in subtropical Chinese forests was very high but other tigers are present in much larger septentrional areas in Russia, from more occidental zones than the Baikal to Kamchatka.

6000 years ago, density is the strongest in India, but Russian territories are almost totally occupied by two types of tigers in two longitudinal bands, Caspian tigers in the meridional band and Siberian tigers in the septentrional one (it's only during the post-neolithic arid period that each of them had submitted a heavy decrease in their distribution).

On the contrary, during the 130 last years, Russian tigers have suffered of three tremendous crises (the first one has been concluded by the worst case of figure, the complete extirpation of Caspian tigers).

For northern tigers, they are in front of death for the third time.

Like the vailliant horseman on the painting by Viktor Vasnetsov (1882), that watches bones that probably belong to him, Russia is today at the cross – roads of ways.

She had inseminated northern China and North America with Siberian tigers during its first golden age, as well as central Asia, Iran, Turkey and oriental Europa with Caspian tigers during its second golden age.

It seems today to be lethargic in front of snuffing of biggest tigers of the world, after having destroyed those of its meridional regions, which were the most occidental in the species.

Like she has already found the energy to act efficiently for tiger safety (at least in two occasions), it has now all means to save giant tigers. It's uniquely a question of political will. Russia can save tigers in a first time, and even, in the long term, offer to them a new golden age.

*Northern tigers are not a sub species.

The two minor sub species are :

Indonesian tigers (*Panthera tigris sondaica*) isolated from congeners during the wet holocene optimum (9000 – 6000 years BP)

Caspian tigers (*Panthera tigris virgata*) isolated from their congeners during the post-neolithic arid period (6000 – 3000 years BP).

They are simply a giant variety of major pool, like prehistoric Eurasian lions (*Panthera leo spelea*), were a giant variety of the original African pool (*Panthera leo leo*).

It is possible that Alaskan tigers would have been a supergiant variety of their Eurasian congeners, like Beringian lions (*Panthera leo atrox*) were a supergiant variety of their Eurasian congeners.