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**Refereed Article**

# Reimagining the Weretiger of the Malay Peninsula: Western Colonial and Chinese Diasporic Perspectives

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**Abstract:**
The weretiger, a fearsome shapeshifting figure from Malay folklore, contrasts sharply with the Malayan tiger, a national symbol revered in Malaysia. Transgressing the boundary between human and beast, it embodies an unsettling other to human society (both protective and perilous) and has permeated the cultural imagination of the Malay Peninsula. Although rooted in local belief systems, the figure has evolved through external and diasporic perspectives, acquiring new meanings beyond its original cultural context. This paper examines shifting representations of the weretiger among observers from outside the primary belief-bearing communities: first in Western colonial writings and then in the Chinese diaspora in historical China and Malaya/Malaysia. The inquiry is situated within the existing scholarly landscape, beginning with Robert Wessing's comprehensive study of Southeast Asian weretiger traditions, which provides a sociological foundation grounded in local beliefs; it further acknowledges Nazry Bahrawi's cultural translation framework regarding how oral traditions have been textualized into modern adaptations within the Malay literary sphere. Building on and moving beyond these perspectives, the paper analyzes how Western colonial authors, particularly Manuel Godinho de Erédia and Hugh Clifford, framed the weretiger within a hierarchical framework of disdain, deploying a two-tiered gaze: the Malay community's gaze toward internal and external others (including marginalized groups such as the Semang and Kerinci), and the Western colonists' gaze toward the Malay community. Finally, it traces how Chinese authors, from Ma Huan and Hsu Yun Tsiao who actually hailed from China, to the more recent Malaysian-born Chinese creators Maniniwei and Amanda Nell Eu, have transformed the weretiger motif from a folkloric curiosity into a vehicle for cultural critique, eventually turning from an external lens to a pursuit of internal authenticity. In doing so, the paper foregrounds the weretiger as a polyvalent symbol whose meanings are constantly renegotiated across historical, cultural, and ideological contexts.

**Keywords:** Weretiger, Malay Peninsula, folklore, hierarchy of disdain, two-tiered gaze, Hugh Clifford, Maniniwei, *Tiger Stripes*

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## Introduction

The Malayan tiger serves as a potent national emblem in Malaysia, symbolizing authority, majesty, courage, ambition, and protection. Its image is prominently featured in the logos of leading institutions and corporations, including Universiti Malaya (Malaysia's premier university), Maybank (Malayan Banking Berhad), and Proton (the national carmaker). In sports, the tiger's distinctive stripes often appear as a signature design on Malaysia's national teams' uniforms, most notably on the Olympic team's jerseys. Interestingly, in the folklore of the Malay Peninsula, the weretiger, a legendary creature derived from the tiger, is depicted as both awe-inspiring and fearsome, in stark contrast to the noble and righteous symbolism of the Malayan tiger.

For readers unfamiliar with the weretiger, it may help to think of its European cousin: the werewolf, a legendary shapeshifter widely known through popular culture.[1] The werewolf thrived in Europe because wolves were a common and familiar threat there, whereas the weretiger emerged in Asia where tigers were the dominant large predator. Owing to their bestial ferocity and the potential threat they pose, both the werewolf and the weretiger are often constructed as unsettling others in relation to human society within their respective regions. Having sketched the comparative context, we must also consider how their shapeshifting ability, while superficially allowing them to transgress the human–beast boundary, more profoundly signals the blurring or even reconfiguration of distinctions between species, identities, and the civilized and the savage. This transformation gives rise to a richer spectrum of social, cultural, and identity-based symbols and meanings, raising a critical question: How ought these newly liberated significations be interpreted?

Previous studies of the weretiger have largely employed sociological and anthropological methods to explore the belief systems of primary local communities, such as examining origins, transmission pathways, and folklore typologies grounded in local oral traditions and colonial archives (Skeat 1900: 157–170; Wessing 1986). Furthermore, a recent study has utilized the framework of cultural translation to examine the development of weretiger folklore within the Malay literary sphere of the Malay Archipelago (Bahrawi 2021: 66–81). In contrast, this paper adopts a comparative literature approach, allowing us to read weretiger texts across genres, languages, and eras as deliberate cultural constructs rather than mere ethnographic curiosities. It investigates how external and diasporic observers, specifically Western colonial writers and diasporic Chinese authors, have engaged with the weretiger as a site of otherness, even as the authors themselves are perceived as a kind of other in a certain sense. By analyzing their texts, the study seeks to uncover the narrative mechanisms of othering they employ in engaging the weretiger myth and to derive broader theoretical insights into the construction of cultural otherness,

1 The phenomena of were-animals, including the weretiger, has been classed as lycanthropy, a concept closely related to the werewolf, by earlier scholars (Wessing 1986: 25).

or, alternatively, to leverage that otherness as a means of critiquing entrenched orthodox values.

It begins with a review of Robert Wessing's comprehensive study of Southeast Asian weretiger traditions, which sets the stage for subsequent analyses. This is followed by an overview of Nazry Bahrawi's research on cultural translation, which addresses the textualization of oral traditions into modern adaptations within the Malay literary sphere. Departing from these scholarly frameworks, the analysis first scrutinizes the historical records produced by Western colonial authors. The investigation commences with Manuel Godinho de Erédia's (1563–1623) record in *Description of Malaca, Meridional India, and Cathay* (1613). This is followed by two short stories by Hugh Clifford (1866–1941), "A Night of Terror" and "The Were-Tiger," both included in *In Court and Kampong: Being Tales and Sketches of Native Life in the Malay Peninsula* (1897). The study then shifts to key engagements within the Chinese diaspora, tracing a trajectory that spans historical China as well as Malaya and present-day Malaysia. This trajectory traces Ma Huan's (馬歡, 1380–1460) brief mention in *Yingya Shenglan* (瀛涯勝覽, 1451) and Hsu Yun Tsiao's (許雲樵, 1905–1981) October 1951 column in *Nanyang Yuebao* (南洋月報), reaching more contemporary manifestations such as Maniniwei's (馬尼尼為, b. 1980) descriptive texts and illustrations in *100 Malay Ghosts* (馬來鬼圖鑒, 2021), and the independent film *Tiger Stripes* (虎紋少女, 2023), written and directed by Amanda Nell Eu (余修善, b.1985).

Drawing on this comparative survey, I argue that external and diasporic perspectives do more than simply exoticize the weretiger; instead, they repeatedly recast the figure as a barometer of cultural anxiety, projecting colonial and diasporic tensions onto its liminal form. By tracing these shifting interpretations, the paper reveals how the weretiger functions as a dynamic site for the ongoing production of otherness, where identities are constantly negotiated across time and space.

## Roars in Nusantara[2]: Endogenous Narratives on the Weretiger

Robert Wessing's *The Soul of Ambiguity: The Tiger in Southeast Asia* (1986) offers a comprehensive synthesis of weretiger traditions and related scholarship across the region. Although much of the research he draws upon originates from Western anthropologists and sociologists, Wessing provides a critical map of the local worldviews that animate the Malay Peninsula. Establishing this foundational understanding of the figure's endogenous roots is essential; it allows for a more

2 Nusantara is a conventional term in the Malay world referring to the maritime regions of Southeast Asia, primarily the Indonesian Archipelago, the Malay Peninsula, and Borneo. Its scope also includes specific areas of Cambodia and Vietnam where Austronesian languages are spoken, as these languages are genetically related and cognate with Malay, reflecting a broader shared linguistic heritage. While weretiger legends are widely distributed throughout Asia, the folklore within Nusantara serves as a typical representation of this phenomenon in Southeast Asia.

nuanced analysis of how the weretiger was later constructed as an other within the narratives of Western colonists and diasporic Chinese authors.

According to Robert Wessing, the weretiger is commonly understood as the posthumous manifestation of kings, nobles, ancestors, holy men, or cultural heroes whose souls and spirits continue to guard and protect their descendants. Among the Malays, weretigers could be seen as chiefs or heroes, or their souls after death which look after the village. For example, in Negeri Sembilan, members of certain families are believed to become tigers after death, serving as protectors of their descendants, crops, and livestock. Places believed to be inhabited by tiger spirits, such as graves or caves thought to be guarded by tiger souls, are often treated as sacred and referred to as *keramat* in both Malay and Indonesian (Wessing 1986: 27–50). Meanwhile, shamans, who are often closely associated with these revered categories, are believed to possess the ability to physically transform into tigers while still alive. Among the various ethnic groups native to the region, for instance, the shamans of the Benua[3] are said to be possessed by ancestral tiger spirits, while those of the Semang are believed to undergo corporeal transformation into tigers during their lifetime (Wessing 1986: 51–63). Extending this typology further, Wessing also includes the "familiar," typically a spirit embodied in animal form, within the broader category of the weretiger, given its analogous role in serving or protecting an individual (Wessing 1986: 63–74).

Wessing concludes that these manifestations "all seem to be rather benevolent creatures, concerned mainly with the protection and continued well being of their charges" (Wessing 1986: 74). However, many folk narratives also feature individuals who transform through magic arts, appearing not as guardians but as bloodthirsty predators with malevolent intent, attacking humans and livestock alike. The distinction between noble tigers and magical weretigers lies in their consumption: the former feed only on ritual offerings, while the latter are said to devour the flesh of those struck by misfortune (Wessing 1986: 74–87). It is worth noting that accusations of such malevolent transformations are often made by members of other communities. This pattern suggests that the circulation of weretiger lore possesses a distinct psychological dimension of othering: it reveals a process where social tensions, fears, and communal anxieties are projected onto the liminal figure of the tiger.

While Wessing's study offers a comprehensive synthesis of the role of the tiger within Southeast Asia, his taxonomy of weretiger phenomena reveals a certain conceptual tension. His categorization is not always grounded in consistent criteria. For instance, familiars—animal spirits closely associated with a specific individual, often a shaman—are included within the weretiger category primarily on the basis of functional similarity. However, Wessing's taxonomy falters by prioritizing

3 "Benua" is the standardized spelling in modern Malay, while earlier sources sometimes use the variant "Banua." In this paper, the original spelling "Banua" will be retained when citing historical documents, in order to faithfully reflect the original records.

functional utility over ontological essence. He categorizes familiars as weretigers based on their protective role, yet this overlooks the lack of any human-tiger transformation, a characteristic indispensable to the core of the weretiger myth. Nevertheless, I do not deny that tiger spirits acting as familiars are sometimes indistinguishable from or intertwined with weretiger folklore, which likely explains Wessing's decision to subsume familiars under the weretiger category.

Nazry Bahrawi's "Were-tigers in Were-text: Cultural Translation and Indigeneity in the Malay Archipelago," which is featured in the 2021 volume *Translation Politics in Southeast Asian Literatures* edited by Grace V.S. Chin, represents a significant recent study on weretiger lore within the Malay Archipelago. Bahrawi examines the evolution of the weretiger trope within the Malay literary sphere by utilizing the theoretical framework of cultural translation. To establish a historical baseline, he identifies three primary categories of precolonial oral folklore: spirit-tigers, naturally born tiger shape-shifters, and humans who employ magic to transform into weretigers. Building upon these categories, his argument centers on modern narratives from both Malaysia and Indonesia: the film *Sitora, the Weretiger* (*Sitora Harimau Jadian*, 1964) by the Malay filmmaker P. Ramlee and the novel *Man Tiger* (*Lelaki Harimau*, 2014) by Eka Kurniawan. Notably, P. Ramlee's work was later novelized by Zakaria Mohd Yassin (1965) and reprinted by Buku Fixi (2012), whereas Kurniawan's novel was translated into English (2015). Bahrawi interprets these two modern narratives as contemporary transformations of traditional weretiger folklore. Specifically, the former addresses the tension between superstition and science, while the latter explores the gray areas between feminism and patriarchy. Ultimately, Bahrawi theorizes these narratives as "were-texts," which are defined as texts that straddle the boundaries between modernity and mythology (Bahrawi 2021: 66–81). Bahrawi's conceptualization of "were-texts" is certainly intriguing. However, narratives that straddle the boundaries between modernity and mythology are common in contemporary literature. Therefore, I question the necessity of establishing this specific category within the Malay literary sphere to explain such a general phenomenon. Ultimately, my primary concern remains the extent to which this concept can offer truly new or original insights into this creative methodology.

The very difficulty Wessing encounters in attempting to impose a coherent typology, aptly hinted at by the title *The Soul of Ambiguity*, in fact highlights the inherent ambiguity and fluidity of the weretiger figure across its various cultural transmissions. Bahrawi examines modern transformations within the Malay literary sphere through the framework of cultural translation, focusing on the tensions between notions of tradition and modernity, yet his analysis does not address literary interpretations beyond this sphere. This paper does not attempt a similar typology or cultural translation approach, but rather seeks to examine how the weretiger has been perceived and interpreted from the perspectives of communities outside the Malay world, particularly Western colonists and the diasporic Chinese authors. To this end, this study employs a comparative literature framework to re-evaluate weretiger

narratives across various genres, languages, and eras, framing them as deliberate cultural constructs rather than simple ethnographic curiosities.

## Hierarchy of Disdain: Gazing Through Western Colonial Eyes

One of the earliest mentions of the weretiger comes from Manuel Godinho de Erédia, a Bugis-Portuguese writer and cartographer based in Malacca, who was also a pioneering theorist of the Austral Land hypothesis. By 1613, Erédia had completed his *Description of Malaca*. He later produced two companion treatises; together, these three works are commonly grouped under the collective title *Description of Malaca, Meridional India, and Cathay*. In Chapter 15, "Concerning Gunoleda,"[4] he documents the legend of *Puteri Gunung Ledang*, a prominent Malay folktale that exists in numerous narrative variants. The term *puteri* is ambiguous, referring variously to a maiden, a princess, or even a queen; Erédia interpreted her as "Queen Putry," indicating that she was regarded as the sovereign of Mount Ledang. To make the tale more accessible to Western readers, Erédia continually drew on ancient Western analogues and customs. For example, he likened Putry to the Thessalian sorceress Eritho or Syrce (modernly spelled "Circe") in Greco-Roman myths, underscoring her witch-like powers and shape-shifting abilities. He also compared Mount Ledang to Mount Athlante, the legendary home of pagan gods, treating the landscape as a sacred, distinctly pagan realm.

"This story must be a fairy-tale; but the natives regard it as true" (Mills 1930: 41). In this context, "natives" refers primarily to the Malay, in contrast to the wild Banuas, the aboriginal tribes said to dwell in the dark caverns of the mountains. The Malay maintain that the "wild Banuas" acquire magical arts enabling them to transform from human into tiger or other animals, and that they communicate with the devil or with Putry.

Around 1560, it was reported that at night the town of Malacca was beset by wild Banuas from the interior who transformed themselves from men into tigers and killed innocent women and children. Dom Jorge de Saint Lucia, the first Bishop of Malacca, organized several massive public religious events—offering a High Mass and a procession on the Feast of the Assumption of Our Lady Protectress of the Fortress—and successfully excommunicated these tigers. Thereafter, no further tiger attacks on villagers occurred. Finally, Erédia proudly claimed that this "miracle" prompted many "heretics" to convert to Christianity (Mills 1930: 41).

That concludes Erédia's brief account of the weretiger, yet it is richly suggestive. From his vantage point, a cascading hierarchy of gazes emerges: the wild Banuas, categorized as "uncivilized" indigenous practitioners of magic, are subject to the gaze of native Malay Muslims, the "civilized" local community, who in turn fall under the colonial gaze of Erédia and his church, the "civilized" European Christian authorities.

4 "Gunoledam" corresponds to the modern Malay Gunung Ledang, meaning Mount Ledang.

Notably, from the Banuas' own perspective, the tigers serve as sacred guardians of Queen Putry on Mount Ledang. Thus, the shapeshifting arts are not malicious sorcery but a form of holy, esoteric knowledge. However, both so-called "civilized" communities, the native Malay Muslims and the European Christians, came to view the sacred guardians as evil creatures menacing human society. Here we see a complete inversion of the tiger's symbolic image. To defeat and expel these malignant beings, the colonial Christian authorities performed several massive Catholic rituals to restore the social order.

Three centuries later, Hugh Clifford, a British colonial administrator who spent over 20 years in Malaya, wrote two short stories about weretigers, "*A Night of Terror"* and "*The Were-Tiger,"* both of which he claimed were based on true events. These stories first appeared in his collection *In Court and Kampong: Being Tales and Sketches of Native Life in the Malay Peninsula* (1897). "*The Were-Tiger"* was subsequently republished in a shortened form in *The Further Side of Silence* (1916).

"A Night of Terror" recounts a horrifying night when a tiger burst into a family home and massacred its occupants. Near the Tembeling River in Pahang, a Malay family of five, together with two distant relatives and two guests, were relaxing and chatting after dinner. When the head of the household, Che Seman, suddenly mentioned the rumor that "He of the Hairy Face" or *Si Pudong*, the taboo name for the tiger, had returned to kill again, insisting that this tiger had once been a man. The story reached its climax when the tiger struck without warning: the household's desperate attempts at defense ended in a brutal slaughter. At dawn, the tiger departed, leaving only Mat, one of the distant relatives, alive, hiding overhead on a high shelf. According to Mat's harrowing testimony, the tiger did not eat its victims but instead toyed with their bodies, even tormenting the little girl before she succumbed. (Clifford 1897: 196–209)

Perhaps the most striking detail is Che Seman's claim that the tiger was a Semang shapeshifter who had been driven out from among the Semang. When his nephew Abdollah suggested that only the men of Korinchi[5] possessed such powers, Che Seman doubled down, insisting that the deep woods Semang possessed them as well. He recalled that, while out seeking jungle produce, he and many others had seen the weretiger's human guise indistinguishable from that of a Semang man—roaming alone, naked, and muttering to himself. As he declared, "All men know that it is He who by night harries us in our villages" (Clifford 1897: 202). However, Che Seman does not explain how he and the Malay villagers came to identify this solitary Semang wanderer as the weretiger. Clifford (assuming the "I" at the end of the stories in this book represents him) acknowledges that the incident was remarkable in every respect: it is the only recorded instance in the Malay Peninsula of a tiger daring to attack men within their closed houses, and the beast mutilated its victims

5 In this paper, the spelling "Korinchi" is retained to faithfully reflect original historical records, as it frequently appears in earlier sources. For contemporary reference, this form is standardized as "Kerinci" in Indonesian and "Kerinchi" in Malaysian.

without consuming them. He seeks to reconstruct, through rational analysis, the psychological basis of the Malay judgment—attributing the tiger's fearlessness and bloodlust to magic—and argues that these very features led them to interpret the attack as the work of humans transformed into tigers. Clifford's hypothesis rests on the subtle affinities between the tiger's monstrous instincts and human physiological impulses, yet he likewise overlooks why the Malay were so convinced that this particular tiger had been transformed from a Semang.

I suggest that the Malay in the story immediately linked the attacking tiger to the Semang because of an underlying hierarchy of disdain between the two groups. Compared to the Malay villagers living on the forest's edge, the Semang are labeled by Che Seman as "the negrits of the woods," a phrase that excludes them from the "civilized" world and relegates them to a more primitive status. This same hierarchy of disdain is further illustrated in another story from Clifford's *In Court and Kampong*, "In a Camp of the Semangs" (Clifford 1897: 171–181), where the social status of different communities—Europeans, the Malay, and the Semang—is explicitly determined by each group's perceived level of civilization, as shown below:

> I, the European, the white man, belonging to one of the most civilised races in the Old World; the Malays, civilised too, but after the fashion of unchanging Asia, which differs so widely from the restless progressive civilisation of the West; and, lastly, the Semangs, squalid savages, nursing no ambitions save those prompted by their empty stomachs, with no hope of change or improvement in their lot, and yet representing one of the oldest races in the world—a race which, though it first possessed the East, with all its possibilities and riches, could utilise none of them, and whose members carry in their eyes the melancholy look of dumb animals, which, when seen on the human countenance, denotes a people who are doomed to speedy extinction, and who, never since time began, have had their day or have played a part in human history. (Clifford 1897: 175–176)

By combining the hierarchies of disdain in these two stories, we see Erédia's two-tiered gaze reemerge over three centuries later: the indigenous Semangs, labeled "savages" who dwell in the woods and wield shape-shifting magic, are viewed as threatening others by Malay Muslims, who, though deemed "civilised" in "the fashion of unchanging Asia," themselves fall under the colonial gaze of Clifford, a European who claimed to belong to the "most civilised" race.

In Semang belief, the *hala* (the community's shaman and healer) can transform into a tiger. Intriguingly, the *hala* is also said to communicate with the blood-thirsty Supreme Being (known as *Kari*, *Karei*, or *Ta Pedn*) or with intermediaries called *cenoi* (Eliade 2004: 337). This belief may explain Che Seman's conviction that the Semang could become tigers. Furthermore, the tiger's role as the *hala*'s embodiment may be tied to the Supreme Being's requirement for blood offerings. What is clear is that, in Semang society, the *hala*'s shapeshifting serves an unambiguously social function that includes both religious and healing roles. However, among more "civilized" communities, this practice was recast as something "savage" and

dangerous: the Semang's marginal social standing made their tiger shapeshifting belief appear menacing, inverting the weretiger's original status as a sacred being. Moreover, the individual Che Seman accused of being a weretiger was himself expelled from the Semang community. If the Semang already occupied a peripheral position within the social hierarchy, this outcast wanderer represented an even more extreme marginalization through the lens of otherness.

The following discussion focuses on another of Clifford's stories, "The Were-Tiger." As noted above, two versions exist. Since the version in *The Further Side of Silence* is abridged, the analysis here will be based primarily on the original text in *In Court and Kampong*.

A Korinchi trader named Haji Ali arrived in Perak from Sumatra with his two sons and settled in Slim Valley. There, they operated a prosperous farm through which they amassed considerable wealth and they practiced their Muslim faith devoutly. Shortly thereafter, this prosperous outsider sought a wife in this poor Malay village and married Patimah, treating her well. Strangely, each night he left the house at dusk and returned only before dawn. On the third night of their marriage, Patimah stayed awake with curiosity and discovered that her husband returned with a tiger's head and a man's body—he was in fact a weretiger! Terrified, she fled through the jungle back to her home, drawing the attention of the entire village. Those poor villagers, who had been disappointed by Haji Ali's choice of wife, now seized the opportunity to mock Patimah's parents. Cut off from the community, Haji Ali and his sons lived in isolation. One night, the village headman, Penghulu Mat Saleh, discovered that a tiger had slain his water buffalo. He and the other villagers laid an ambush and wounded the beast's leg, then followed its tracks straight to Haji Ali's stilted house. There they found only Ali's sons, Abas and Abdulrahman, who claimed their father was too ill to see visitors. The villagers' exchange with the two young men grew increasingly tense, and in the end the villagers chose to withdraw. As they descended the steps of the stilted house, they noticed that the floor beneath Haji Ali's room was stained a dim red. Mat Saleh reported the incident to the district's British officer, who met the story with typical European skepticism. A few days later, Haji Ali and his sons vanished without a trace. Clifford, skeptical of the weretiger tale, initially suspected they were victims of foul play. Several months afterward, they reappeared in another part of the peninsula, with Haji Ali badly limping on his right leg (Clifford 1897: 62–77).

In this story, the weretiger is also portrayed as an outsider. Although the Semang are indigenous to the Malay Peninsula, "civilized" society still casts them as outsiders; similarly, a Korinchi man from Sumatra—even one who is Muslim and, in some contexts, regarded as ethnically Malay—remains an outsider in purely geographic terms. Whether excluded by cultural norms or by origin, both figures occupy the margins in these stories—strangers perceived as the constructed others.

At the outset of "The Were-Tiger," Clifford offers a lengthy discussion before the story proper begins, in which he notes that the Malay were well acquainted with

incidents of Korinchi men transforming into tigers. For example, he recounts that Haji Abdullah, also from Korinchi, was once caught in a tiger trap, and that countless others, after undergoing transformation, were said to have vomited feathers or to have abandoned their garments and trading packs in the thickets (Clifford 1897: 65). Wessing similarly records two incidents in which Korinchi men were suspected of transforming into tigers and were subsequently killed in the Malay states (Wessing 1986: 75–76). In addition, Frank Swettenham documented two cases of Korinchi men transforming into tigers on the Malay Peninsula, one of which took place in Perak. The Korinchi people, however, were unhappy about the rumors and insisted that not all possessed such magic, and that only the inhabitants of the Chenaku district in the interior of Korinchi who practiced occult arts could transform, while ordinary Korinchi people were fearful of entering the Chenaku district (Swettenham 1895: 200–201).

Notably, throughout the nineteenth century, a number of records attest to Korinchi men in the Malay Peninsula transforming into tigers. I suggest that this may be related to the large-scale migration of Korinchi people to the Malay Peninsula during that period.[6] Evidently, these newcomers aroused suspicion and unease among the local Malay. As the shapeshifter legends from Korinchi began to circulate in the Malay Peninsula, they were likely reshaped by local anxieties and aversions toward outsiders, thus giving rise to the reported incidents.

In contrast to "A Night of Terror," Clifford presents his viewpoint more explicitly in the extended introductory passage of "The Were-Tiger."[7] On the one hand, Clifford adopts a tone of irony to critique the Society for Psychical Research for uncritically treating faith as reality. He also targets educated Europeans who assume the world has been disenchanted, while remaining ignorant of cultures beyond Europe. In his view, the were-tiger folktale is best understood as a projection of human fear of wild beasts, as well as a deep unease with the greed, bloodlust, and tendency toward violence against one's own kind embedded in primitive human nature. On the other hand, he sought to suspend judgment on the were-tiger story and emphasized the importance of understanding the native view on human existence. Among the Malay, for example, encounters between the mundane and the supernatural are understood as parallel, coexisting realities. Though such

6 For example, Kampung Kerinchi, literally "Kerinchi Village," is an area in Kuala Lumpur that emerged around 1870 as one of the earliest Korinchi immigrant settlements and remains extant today. In 2012, Kuala Lumpur City Hall renamed it "Bangsar South," a decision that provoked widespread public criticism. In January 2019, the city officially restored the name Kampung Kerinchi on historical and socio-political grounds. (Malay Mail 19 January 2019; https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2019/01/19/bangsar-south-officially-reverts-to-kg-kerinchi-in-win-for-identity-traditi/1714191)

7 However, in the abridged version published nearly 20 years later, he removed almost half of the original introductory passage—particularly the sections criticizing the Society for Psychical Research (Clifford 1916: 40–55). Perhaps it provoked a backlash. Regrettably, his true motive for the omission remains unknown.

experiences may evoke fear, they do not necessarily elicit surprise, as both realms are regarded as equally real.

Clifford often oscillated between two ends of the spectrum: at times, he portrayed the local people as still trapped in the "dark centuries," yet he also showed genuine empathy toward them. He upheld the ideals of Western Enlightenment, while simultaneously criticizing the arrogance of European intellectuals—perhaps without even realizing how contradictory and unsettling such a mindset was. This ambiguity and vacillation in his perspective are precisely what set Clifford apart from conventional Eurocentric thinkers, and they reflect the growing self-reflexivity among colonial officials and scholars in the late nineteenth century.

The framework of the two-tiered gaze may once again be applied to examine the dynamics between the Korinchi people, the local Malay, and the European observer. In the story, the Korinchi men, wealthy outsiders from Sumatra, are regarded as strangers by the local Malay, despite their shared religious and ethnic identity. The European initially suspects that the were-tiger narrative is a convenient pretext through which the Malay could legitimize acts of hostility toward outsiders. However, upon learning of Haji Ali's reappearance, now limping, he ultimately refrains from drawing a definitive conclusion.

Kerinci, a regency in today's Jambi Province in Indonesia, is a natural habitat for tigers and the source of much folklore involving them, including tales of weretigers. It is said that two villages near Kerinci are inhabited by the Cindaku (also known as Chendaku) people. The inhabitants of these villages are said to possess the ability to transform: one into werepigs, the other into weretigers. At certain times of the year, the werepigs are believed to raid farmers' gardens, while the weretigers are said to hunt for human prey (Wessing 1986: 96–97). Meanwhile, according to research by Hebransyah Usman and his team, the community of Pulau Tengah, a traditional village located within Kerinci, preserves the tale of Bujang Nunggal and the Tiger Princess of Pasemah. This story is performed through a ritual known as *ngagoah imo* (literally, "tiger roaring"), which functions as a means of reinforcing social order. (Usman et al. 2014: 24–44)

This indicates that the tales of weretigers in Kerinci encompass both protective and threatening dimensions. However, when the Kerinci people migrate to other regions such as the Malay Peninsula, their perceived foreignness, strangeness, and marginality give rise to a sense of threat and anxiety among local communities. As a result, local communities tend to reduce the complex weretiger mythology associated with the Kerinci people to a simplified and threatening image of aggression. On one level, this narrative serves to explain incidents of tiger sightings, attacks, or livestock predation, thereby alleviating local anxieties surrounding such events. On another level, the underlying unease triggered by the presence of the Kerinci is projected onto specific events, reinforcing local suspicions and validating their distrust of outsiders. From an ecological standpoint, the growing number of tiger incursions into human settlements may be attributed to ongoing encroachment

on tiger habitats. In response to this phenomenon, the Kerinci people are perceived by the Malay in the Malay Peninsula as scapegoats: symbolic figures through whom communal anxieties are projected and the disruption is rendered intelligible.

## From Folkloric Curiosity to a Vehicle of Critique: Chinese Diasporic Reframings of the Weretiger

While ethnic Chinese constitute an integral part of the Malaysian citizenry, weretiger folklore in the Malay Peninsula is conventionally perceived as the cultural heritage of the Malay and indigenous peoples. Consequently, when Chinese authors engage with these legends, they inevitably occupy the position of outsiders, a status that, to some extent, mirrors the perspective of Western observers. This paper identifies the four Chinese authors, hailing from diverse temporal and spatial contexts, as "diasporic Chinese," primarily because all four have traversed both identitarian and geographical boundaries.[8] Specifically, Ma Huan and Hsu Yun Tsiao represent one group: as individuals originally from China, they encountered these indigenous legends from an external vantage point and mediated them for the Chinese community. Conversely, Maniniwei and Amanda Nell Eu constitute a second group: as Malaysians who moved abroad, they reimagine these local myths from a distance to re-examine the complexities of identity. Intriguingly, for all four authors, the discourse on the weretiger emerges precisely at the juncture of these geographical and identity-based crossings.

The historical depth of such cultural encounters is best epitomized by the Ming dynasty voyager Ma Huan. As the earliest representative of the first group of diasporic Chinese observers, Ma Huan accompanied Cheng Ho (鄭和, 1371–1433) on three of his maritime expeditions. In his *Yingya Shenglan*, written more than a century before de Erédia's account of Malacca, Ma Huan recorded the following tale:

> In the state [Translator's note: Malacca], a tiger once transformed into a man, slipped into the town, and mingled with the crowd. However, a discerning observer saw through its disguise, captured it, and killed it.[9](Feng 1955: 25)

This earliest testimony also recounts the expulsion of the weretiger. In contrast to de Erédia's richly detailed account of a grand Christian exorcism to drive out the creature, Ma Huan's narrative simply underscores the locals' ingenuity. Their

8 While the term "diasporic Chinese" has been the subject of extensive academic debate, this paper employs the term through a performative lens, focusing on the lived experience and the act of traversing geographical and identitarian boundaries. This approach is exemplified by Ma Huan, much of whose life was spent in overseas travel, facilitating a continuous crossing of boundaries and the transmission of foreign exotica back to the Ming world. By emphasizing the "crossing" intrinsic to these authors' movements, this study draws a parallel between their spatial displacement and the transgression of the human–beast boundary embodied in weretiger folklore.

9 My translation. Original text: "國中有虎化為人，入市混人而行，自有識者，擒而殺之。"

vigilance regarding the weretiger's disguise further demonstrates the folklore's widespread popularity across the region.

Five centuries later, in October 1951, Hsu Yun Tsiao published a short column on weretiger lore, titled "The Magic of Humans Transforming into Tigers" (人變虎的法術), in *Nanyang Yuebao*, Vol. 2, No. 7 (Hsu 2017: 392). A pivotal figure in Chinese diaspora scholarship in Nanyang (the "South Sea" from the perspective of China), Hsu's own life embodied the diasporic experience after leaving the Republic of China and residing in Singapore for many decades. As part of his broader effort to introduce local indigenous culture to the Nanyang Chinese community, Hsu briefly documented the weretiger folklore of the Malay Peninsula as an illustration of the region's diverse traditions. In addition to citing the accounts of Ma Huan and de Erédia, Hsu recorded two further instances of weretiger transformation in the twentieth century, one in Kuala Lumpur in 1923 and another in Kelantan in 1929. Although he did not provide further details about these two incidents, my review of the literature suggests that Hsu's source was likely the notes written by J. V. Mills for Erédia's *Description of Malaca*. Interestingly, the subject of the Kuala Lumpur case was not Malay, but Indian (Mills 1930: 167). Hsu also noted that the Malay referred to such occurrences as *Chenaku* or *Blian*, and believed that they would only afflict those who accepted the lore. However, he again offered no further explanation and his information in this case, too, appears to have been drawn from Mills's notes (Mills 1930: 166). As discussed in the previous section, *Chenaku* refers to a sub-group of the Kerinci people believed to possess the ability to transform into tigers. *Blian* should be rendered as the standard Malay *belian*, meaning "shaman" and the weretiger is sometimes called *harimau belian*, literally "the shaman's tiger." Both terms imply that the weretiger is a being transformed through magic.

At the end of this short column, Hsu likens these weretiger accounts to a Nanyang counterpart *Liaozhai* (聊齋, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*), characterizing them as mere fodder for idle conversation over drinks and tea. *Liaozhai* is a cornerstone of the *zhiguai* (志怪, tales of the strange) tradition in classical Chinese literature, and by drawing this parallel, Hsu effectively made the weretiger folklore more accessible to Chinese readers, but only as sensational entertainment, with no intention of exploring its deeper cultural significance.

For the second group of observers writing from the diaspora, contemporary reimaginings depart from the curiosity-driven framing of the mid-twentieth century to explore the psychological and ontological depths of the myth. In 2021, Maniniwei, a Malaysian Chinese writer long based in Taiwan, featured the weretiger in the chapter "Raising the Little Ghosts" (人養小鬼) of her book *100 Malay Ghosts*, with a brief descriptive text and her own ingenious illustrations. In that chapter, she illustrated the weretiger as a comical tiger-headed man. Rather than using the terms *huren* (虎人) or *renhu* (人虎), which more directly correspond to "weretiger," she opted for *laohugui* (老虎鬼), literally "tiger ghost" or "tiger spirit," to reinforce her

book's ghostly theme, and in Malay she uses *harimau jadian*, whose root *jadi* ("to become") underscores the creature's transformative nature. According to Maniniwei, the tiger transformation magic, known for its ferocity and formidable offensive power, can be learned either for protection or for rivalry. A master of the tiger spirit may transform into a full tiger form or a partial form with only a tiger's head, but must then carefully perform a ritual to release the spirit or risk a disastrous fate (Maniniwei 2021: 62–63).

Maniniwei argues that little ghosts are closely associated with rivalry, protection, and assistance with tasks, reflecting humans' awareness of their own limitations and their desire to invoke external forces to secure more advantageous conditions for survival (Maniniwei 2021: 172). However, her book is not a rigorous academic study but rather a literary author's whimsical, illustrated compendium of Malay ghosts. The category of "little ghosts" in this book seems to draw on both Chinese folk practices of little ghost-raising and the Thai Kuman Thong tradition, thereby providing a cross-cultural analogical framework that makes Malay ghost culture more accessible to Chinese readers. From an anthropological perspective, the nine spirits[10] cataloged in the chapter "Raising the Little Ghosts" should largely be regarded as familiars dispatched by shamans, entities that perform rivalrous, protective, and task-assisting functions on their masters' behalf.

Maniniwei's impetus for writing *100 Malay Ghosts* stemmed from her long sojourn of over 20 years in Taiwan, a land far from her hometown. Occasional recollections of the Malay ghost stories she heard in her youth, whether inspired by fear or by a sense of the mysterious bond between Malay culture and the natural world, sparked her curiosity and led her to explore the lore of Malay ghosts (Maniniwei 2021: 173). Her two most recent picturebooks, *Princess of Mount Ledang* (金山公主, 2022) and *The Specter Huntsman* (鬼獵人, 2024), draw directly on this lore. At the end of *Princess of Mount Ledang*, Maniniwei offers a brief introduction to the legend and notes that several versions exist. In both Skeat's *Malay Magic* (1900) and *Shaman, Saiva and Sufi: A Study of the Evolution of Malay Magic* (1925), this tale uniquely includes an episode in which the princess murders her husband, a detail absent from other variants. Maniniwei interprets this as a symbol of female independence. Intriguingly, Skeat's 1925 account goes on to say that after the murder, the princess settled on Jugra Hill in Selangor with two cats that could transform into ghost tigers, which then became the guardians of a local shrine (Maniniwei 2022). *The Specter Huntsman* likewise draws on Skeat's *Malay Magic*, with Maniniwei arguing in her afterword that desire is the core of this ancient lore: the very force that brings humans trouble by transforming them into ghosts or other non-human entities (Maniniwei 2024b). In contemporary Malaysia, Malay ghost stories, as well as weretiger folklore, occupy an almost absurd status: they are denounced as heterodox by Islamic authorities, derided as superstition by modern rationality, and are reduced to cheap

10 Jerangkung, saka (or hantu pusaka), polong, toyol, hantu raya, harimau jadian, penunggu, hantu kuang, and hantu bujang. (Maniniwei 2021: 50–65)

thrills in low-budget horror films. Yet instead of trivializing these specters, Maniniwei reasserts their uncanny reality, reminding us that "there are still many things unseen and unknown" (Maniniwei 2021: 174), "some things have reasons, and some do not; the world has always been this way, always filled with mysteries we will never understand" (Maniniwei 2024b), which truly matters.

Revisiting the early accounts of the weretiger, frequently bound up with the anxieties that local communities projected onto outsiders (as discussed in the previous section), and contrasting them with Maniniwei's nostalgic as well as diasporic retellings reveals a striking inversion of perspective. However, this should not be dismissed as mere homesickness: the very themes of her subsequent works, *No Avenue* (沒有大路, 2018) and *Useless Hometown* (故鄉無用, 2024), actively seek to dispel any longing for homeland. For Maniniwei, the inexplicable personal experiences carry more weight than the moral certainties upheld by abstract social norms. As she admits, her homeland ultimately became "vanished" and "useless" to her: "However, these things have already taken root within me; I alone remain interested in these people and in these matters" (Maniniwei 2024a: 263–64). This tension captures her ambivalent relationship with her homeland: she both repudiates it and writes about it, since "homeland" dialectically encompasses the illusory expectations of others as well as her own concrete experiences and memories. While earlier colonial and native records utilized the weretiger as a tool of externalization by casting the other (such as the Kerinci or the Semang) as a predatory threat to social order, Maniniwei's work performs a process of internalization. For her, the weretiger, as one of a hundred Malay ghosts, is no longer an other that needs to be purged or cast out; instead, it is a "spectral reality" rooted within her own identity as a migrant.

Finally, this discussion will turn to the independent film *Tiger Stripes* (*虎紋少女*, 2023), written and directed by Amanda Nell Eu. The film offers a fresh reinterpretation of the weretiger tale by intertwining it with the bodily and social challenges experienced by Zaffan, a carefree Malay girl undergoing puberty. In her NOWNESS interview, Eu remarked on her motivation for creating the film:

> I wanted to tell a coming-of-age story of a teenage girl through the lens of body horror. For girls, puberty itself is a perfect match with the body-horror genre; their bodies undergo such rapid, violent transformations in a short span of time that what comes next is completely unknown. At the same time, adolescent girls, as women at other stages of life, are all too often labeled "hysterical," "crazy," or "over-emotional," as if there were no real difference between a "pubescent girl" and a "monster." I wanted to challenge that prejudice. In the story, our heroine is just beginning to become a woman, yet she simultaneously mutates into a monster. But who, really, is the monster? What standards of "beauty" has society imposed? What does it accept, and what does it reject? That is the question that *Tiger Stripes* seeks to explore. (NOWNESS 2023)

Early in the film, a rural legend about a girl who vanished is briefly alluded to. Ina, a village girl, is said to have violated female taboos within the Malay-Muslim

context by being careless in washing her menstrual pads. One night, she allegedly went mad and fled into the jungle. She became increasingly defiant toward her parents and teachers, and eventually disappeared. Some villagers later claimed to have seen her wandering in the forest. The legend takes a more personal turn when Zaffan, the cheerful protagonist, glimpses a ghostly female figure perched in a tree while playing in a jungle near a neighboring village, which is a moment that can be read as a foreshadowing of her own transformation.

Not long after, Zaffan begins to experience strange and unsettling changes in her body as she enters puberty. At the same time, she faces a range of challenges, including the strictures of family and religion, peer bullying, and the psychological anxieties of adolescence. In response to these pressures, Zaffan retaliates by transforming into a weretiger. Superficially, this metamorphosis reflects the terrifying physical changes her body undergoes during puberty. On a more symbolic level, however, the metamorphosis signifies an act of resistance. Within the Islamic cultural context, the weretiger is an unorthodox figure associated with primal and untamed instincts. Through this transformation, Zaffan's rebellious and defiant nature is awakened, empowering her to confront dominant and dogmatic social norms and to push back against peer aggression. As she embraces her feline power, she is increasingly viewed by the village as the other, a perceived threat to the established communal order. The film reaches its climax when Zaffan brutally kills the exorcist, a figure representing religious authority and social regulation.

Contrasted with the norm-enforcing and socially restrictive institutions of village life, particularly school and family, Zaffan consistently feels more at ease in the jungle near the neighboring village, as the film repeatedly portrays scenes of her playing freely and joyfully in the forest. After Zaffan's transformation into a weretiger, her gentle friend Mariam encounters her wandering in the jungle and the film inserts a brief, poetic scene: the two girls, still in their school uniforms, sit together on the grass. Zaffan says, "Let's live here forever, we'll build a treehouse." This moment may be a memory, or perhaps a fantasy, suggesting that the jungle stands in direct opposition to a society structured by norms and constraints. It functions as a space of liberation and self-expression, where nature affirms Zaffan's authenticity and inner truth. As Eu explained in her NOWNESS interview:

> I believe there is no setting more fitting for a young woman's soul than the damp, mysterious jungle. The jungle perfectly embodies her psyche: it is beautiful, powerful, and wild, yet also merciless and violent. Most importantly, it is free; there are no rules, no laws, no social structures. Its beauty is the most primordial. These are precisely the qualities I wanted my protagonist in *Tiger Stripes* to express. (NOWNESS 2023)

Eu's construction of a spatial dichotomy between the jungle and the village, which identifies these locations as the respective realms of the animal (the tiger) and the human, embodies the tension between freedom and constraint. This symbolic division finds a profound parallel in Daoist critiques of the conflict between

primordial authenticity and social convention, a philosophical concern deeply rooted in early Chinese thought and sustained across two millennia of intellectual tradition.

*Tiger Stripes* can be understood as a coming-of-age film that draws on the conventions of the *Bildungsroman*. From the very beginning, Zaffan is portrayed as a carefree girl, symbolizing an innate sense of authenticity and unrestrained joy. However, as she enters puberty, she is confronted with a series of intense challenges. Her passage into adolescence takes the form of a radical metamorphosis: she reclaims her autonomy through a metaphorical transformation, with the weretiger's wildness and rage embodying her resistance against the external constraints imposed upon her. The film opens and closes with scenes of Zaffan dancing on TikTok, framing the narrative with a powerful image of self-expression. This circular structure suggests that the freedom and authenticity she possessed at the beginning are not lost, but painfully re-earned through struggle and self-assertion. The dancing becomes a symbol of joy reclaimed, even at great cost. Yet behind this seemingly triumphant ending lies a more melancholic truth. Zaffan is not the first weretiger in the village and she will not be the last. In the final sequence, after Mariam enters the jungle in search of Zaffan, it is subtly implied that she, too, undergoes the same transformation. This suggests that the social norms and restrictions haunting young girls continue to exert their force, and that the weretiger tale, as a symbol of resistance, will continue to resurface as long as such social constraints remain entrenched within the community.

## Conclusion

From an indigenous standpoint, the weretiger is an awe-inspiring force; its formidable presence and fierce courage evoking both reverence and fear, and, most significantly, embodying an ambivalent duality as both protector and predator. Western colonists saw the lore very differently. Framed by Enlightenment ideals, they dismissed the weretiger as savage and in need of "civilizing," reducing its image to that of a feared menace. Yet this view was far from uniform. Manuel Godinho de Erédia advocated expelling the weretiger through religious ritual, whereas over three centuries later, Hugh Clifford strove to engage with and understand it through rational inquiry. In addition, this paper maps out a hierarchy of disdain in Western colonial writings, which in reality reflects a two-tiered gaze. The first tier is the Malay community's gaze toward non-Malay groups, which includes both aboriginal tribes such as the Benua and Semang, and foreigners like the Kerinci people; while the second tier is the Western colonists' gaze toward the Malay community. From a postcolonial perspective, critics often focus on the colonizers' gaze, but overlook how local majorities, feeling anxious and threatened by outsiders or marginalized groups, also cast a disdainful gaze that scapegoats the other in times of crisis. The three colonial-era texts and related contemporary records discussed above all demonstrate how those accused of transforming into weretigers were singled out as the primary threat to social order. In recent years in Malaysia, postcolonialism, once

celebrated as a progressive framework, has been appropriated by some to marginalize cultural difference and promote an "essentialist" or "pure" nationalism aligned with specific political agendas. These historical case studies remind us that, while colonial injustices demand our attention, the deeper issue is the perennial tendency of any majority to scapegoat vulnerable minorities in times of anxiety, which is a dynamic as old as the weretiger legend itself. Equally important is acknowledging the intricate interplay of history, culture, and ethnicity, for there exists no genuinely "pure" or "essentialist" nation.

The group of early Chinese observers writing from the diaspora, however, offered yet another perspective. As a voyager-scholar, Ma Huan introduced audiences in the Ming world to the exotic customs and curiosities of the Nanyang, including weretiger lore, as part of his broader effort to disseminate knowledge of Malay culture. In October 1951, Hsu Yun Tsiao, who was a migrant literatus in the Nanyang and, like many of his twentieth-century Malaysian and Singaporean Chinese peers, invested in fostering interracial understanding and contributing to nascent nation-building, framed his accounts of Malay folklore as a means of bolstering indigenous knowledge. Yet he dismissed the supernatural elements of weretiger lore as implausible curiosities rather than serious traditions. In essence, both observers from China, hailing from the Ming dynasty and the Republican era respectively, treated weretiger folklore in the Malay Peninsula as the object of curiosity-seeking, at times slipping into sensationalism.

Another group of observers, comprising Maniniwei and Amanda Nell Eu, represents a distinct diasporic trajectory, as both are Malaysian-born Chinese who have spent the majority of their lives abroad. With Maniniwei residing in Taiwan for over 20 years and Eu spending her formative years in the United Kingdom, their transnational mobility fosters a diasporic sensibility that stands in contrast to that of the earlier observers. This transnational mobility, combined with their distinctly female viewpoints, drives them to question and resist the so-called orthodox lifestyles and patriarchal norms imposed by society, thereby challenging conventional frameworks. Maniniwei turns to the unseen and unknowable ghost stories of her homeland, among which the weretiger or tiger ghost is but one prominent instance, as a form of resistance against the trivial, stifling routines prescribed for "women" by social convention. In the very act of writing, she taps into an ineffable yet deeply authentic dimension of lived experience, seeking out what truly matters. Eu likewise embraces a raw truth: "I'm not here to tell you what's right and good or what's wrong and bad. Reality simply is, it's just one side of the truth. In my film, that translates into the love, hatred, jealousy, and misunderstandings that exist between women…" (NOWNESS 2023). Yet when it comes to the weretiger symbol, Eu goes further than Maniniwei, transforming it into a powerful tool of critique. She reimagines this ancient legend to question and confront entrenched local orthodoxies. As The Interview Asia aptly summarizes: "In Amanda Nell Eu's films, women are always portrayed as primordial and beautiful, liberated from the male voyeuristic gaze and instead engaged in an intimate dialogue

among themselves" (The Interview Asia 2023). Eu not only seeks to free women from the confines of the male gaze, but in fact also to liberate the weretiger from centuries of the gaze of mainstream society and its dominant ideologies. While the six observers selected for this study, including both Western colonists and Chinese diasporic figures, are all in some sense positioned as outsiders to the weretiger folklore of the Malay Peninsula, a fundamental distinction remains. In contrast to the external gaze that characterized the preceding groups of male authors, Maniniwei and Eu internalize the folklore—and the symbol of the weretiger in particular—as emblems of their shared quest for inner authenticity. This symbolism provides a vital spiritual sanctuary for women who must perpetually navigate the enduring constraints of patriarchal social norms.

Viewed in this light, this pursuit of liberation through metamorphosis participates in a broader, global contemporary movement where female creators repurpose animal transformation as a vehicle for self-assertion. Significantly, *Turning Red* (2022), directed by Domee Shi, was released just a year before *Tiger Stripes*. This film similarly utilizes the metamorphosis of a pubescent girl into an animal, in this case a red panda, as a metaphor for adolescent anxiety. Furthermore, recent years have seen an increasing number of novels that re-examine weretiger legends from a female perspective. For instance, set in 1931 British Malaya, Yangsze Choo's *The Night Tiger* (2019) intertwines the weretiger folklore of the Malay Peninsula with Chinese Confucian virtues, exemplified by the naming of characters such as Ren (humanity) and Yi (righteousness), while simultaneously subverting the established trope by casting a British man as the weretiger.[11] K-Ming Chang's *Bestiary* (2020) reimagines the Taiwanese legend of Hu Gu Po (the tiger granny spirit) to explore the intricate mysteries of matrilineal heritage. Meanwhile, Hanna Alkaf's *Hamra and the Jungle of Memories* (2023) represents a contemporary effort by the Malay author to draw inspiration from local weretiger lore, framing it as an adventure narrative reminiscent of "Little Red Riding Hood." These developments suggest that the transformative and liminal characteristics inherent in "were-creatures," particularly the weretiger, have become a vital tool for female creators to interrogate the intersectional complexities of identity, such as gender and ethnicity, alongside socio-spatial and institutional constructs like family, homeland, religion, and politics. By emphasizing the inherent fluidity of ontological and cultural boundaries, these works

11 It is noteworthy that Yangsze Choo's *The Night Tiger* (2019), a notable work in contemporary Anglophone literature that reimagines the weretiger motif, shares a similar thematic focus with the cases analyzed in this study. However, in discussing recent Chinese diasporic works concerning the weretiger, this paper prioritizes the exploration of how the creature has transitioned from an external other into an internalized psychological or physiological manifestation, such as the "spectral reality" of migrant identity in Maniniwei's writing and the bodily alienation in Amanda Eu's film. Since Choo's narrative focuses primarily on the deconstruction of colonial power within the historical mystery genre, where the weretiger is largely manifested through a character other than the narrator or protagonist, its textual characteristics diverge from the focus on internalization centralized in this research. Consequently, it is included here as a compelling supplement to the broader trend of contemporary reconstruction.

facilitate a critical re-evaluation of established norms and encourage the formulation of alternative epistemologies regarding the self and the world.

The tiger, as the nation's most revered emblem of authority, nonetheless conceals within its majesty a capacity for brutality and disdain, and yet it can be repurposed as a weapon to challenge power, as well as a liberated, numinous creature symbolizing inner authenticity. All these contradictions find their nexus in the weretiger, that legendary creature, laying bare the tiger's own ambiguity and complexity. Perhaps, the next time we meet the tiger's razor-sharp, solemn gaze, we must dare to look into its depths, peering into the heart of its wild, inscrutable soul.

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