

Scientists Draw Distribution Map of Grey Wolves in China

As one of the earliest domesticated animals, dogs are widely distributed across the world. However, the distribution of their ancestor, the grey wolf, in China is still controversial. While many well-known western literatures claimed that grey wolves were never presented in large part of China, it is not rare to find the image of these wolves in totem, fresco, poetry, essays and folktales as spiritual symbols in the past.

To solve this discrepancy, researchers from the Kunming Institute of Zoology, Chinese Academy of Sciences and Yunnan University recently conducted a comprehensive investigation to illuminate the distributions of grey wolves in China.

“The misconceptions are long-standing, from Sokolov and Rossolimo’s book in 1985 to a recent review published by Larson and Fuller in 2014”, said Dr. WANG Guodong, lead author of the study. “These inaccurate descriptions are misleading and hindering our understanding of the origin of wolves and dogs, and maybe eventually, the origin of human beings”.

In this study, evidences were raised from literature, skin specimens and fossil records. The scientists systematically investigated a large quantity of Chinese literatures about wild animal surveys, among which over 100 articles and books contain descriptions on the distributions of grey wolves in China. They also examined a total of 26 wolf skins from the National Zoological Museum of China, Kunming Natural History Museum of Zoology, and Shaanxi Institute of Zoology. They found that these specimens were collected from 13 provinces across the country. By investigating the fossil records, they identified 25 archaeological sites with wolf remains in China.

Dogs appear to have evolved solely from wolves, and it was assumed that dogs may have originated from



grey wolves in southern China. Since ancient times, dogs have migrated with humans, and have been humanity’s companions for at least 33,000 years. Therefore, understanding the distribution of wolves is vital to the understanding of the origin of dogs, and eventually, the origin and migration patterns of human beings.

With strong and comprehensive evidences, this study provided an updated description of wolf distributions in China. “Grey wolves did distribute across all parts of the Chinese mainland. This information is significant and should be delivered to an international audience”, said Dr. WANG.

The main findings of this study have been published in *Zoological Research*.