

Case Study of Panda Diplomacy in 1972

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Abstract

Panda diplomacy has been carried out in China for a long time. The earliest activity can be traced back to A.D.685, when the emperor of Japan was presented with pandas by empress Wu Ze-tian of China. In modern times, Soong May-ling and Soong Ai-ling proposed panda diplomacy to the United States on behalf of the government of the republic of China in 1941 to thank the United States for its assistance during the war of resistance against Japanese aggression. As a unique creature of China, panda is of great significance as a diplomatic gift, which has caused great repercussions in western countries. Now I will use the method of case analysis to interpret and analyze the problems existing in the communication effect and continuity of this case.

Keywords

Panda; Diplomacy; China; National Zoo; United States.

1. Introduction

As an essential part of conventional diplomacy, the existence of public diplomacy has its necessity. In form, it can be led by official or civil society. For example, Microsoft, an American technology company, undertakes the mission of public diplomacy, demonstrating American values in various countries and regions around the world. As for modern China, real public diplomacy activities started relatively late. Among them, there are four well-known public diplomatic activities: panda diplomacy, ping-pong diplomacy, Confucius Institute, and the opera "First Emperor of Qin". Thereinto, the panda diplomacy is equipped with the strongest Chinese characteristics and is irreplaceable. The main feature of China's public diplomacy in modern and even contemporary times is still to build a "new China" that transcends the system and ideology, and to shape the international image of China as the world's third power that strives for "peace", "prosperity" and "friendliness". It is panda's charmingly naive appearance and friendly character, coupled with its typically regional characteristics that enable it to become the diplomatic "national treasure" to embody China's core values.

2. Historical Reasons for the Emergence of Panda Diplomacy

"Panda", which is also called cat bear (scientific name: *Ailuropoda melanoleuca*), is an endemic species in China. It usually inhabits the Sichuan Basin in central and western China and the Qinling region in southern Shanxi province and its body color is mainly black and white. "As of the end of 2016, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) reduced the threat level of giant pandas from 'endangered' to 'vulnerable'." (Endangered or Vulnerable, who to listen to? --A survey of the current status of giant panda conservation in Shaanxi Province [N]. 2016/10/12. Shanxi Daily. (In Chinese).) As a result, not only did Panda become a symbol of World-Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in 1961, but also it was known as "National Treasure" and "Living Fossil" by China. What's more, it plays a crucial role in China's expansion of soft power and international popularity. The earliest panda's diplomatic history can be traced back to the

Tang Dynasty. According to the Japanese “Royal Yearbook”, as early as the first year (A.D.685) of Empress Dowager Wu Ze- tian, the Tang Empire presented two “White Bears” (panda) and 70 “White Bear” furs to the Japanese Emperor Tianwu. On November 9, 1941, in order to thank the United States for its support to China in the War of Resistance Against Japan, the Chinese National Government entitled Soong May-ling and Soong Ai-ling as representatives to present one male panda and one female panda as “national gifts” to the United States, one male and one female. Since then, the road of panda diplomacy was officially started.



Figure 1. The National Zoo’s giant pandas, Ling-Ling & Hsing-Hsing in 1974. Charles Tasnadi/Associated Press

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/07/nyregion/the-pandas-richard-nixon-obtained-for-the-us.html> (Picture))

After the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the President of China Mao Ze-dong and Premier Zhou En-lai, deeply realized that pandas, as China’s cherished species, have a special status in diplomacy, and it was significant for new china to continue this form of diplomacy so as to engage in foreign affairs activities. From 1957 to the end of 1982, the People’s Republic of China donated a total of 23 pandas to nine countries, including the Soviet Union and the United States. Since then, influenced by conventions such as the “Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora”, panda was no longer be given as a gift for political exchanges, but for “leases” and “collaborative research”. The case model I mainly researched here is President Nixon’s visit to China in 1972. During this visit, he received the “National Gifts”: panda “Ling-Ling” (female) and panda “Hsing- Hsing” (male). Also, it is the first time since the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 that the central people’s government has given a national gift to a western capitalist country and made efforts to formally establish diplomatic relations between the two countries.

3. The Impact of Panda Diplomacy in 1972

According to Ding Yuanhong, China's former director of the US Department of the United States and Australia, who was personally involved in the preparations for the former US President Nixon's visit to China, at the banquet, Premier Zhou Enlai showed Mrs. Nixon a pack of panda cigarette, pointing at the panda picture on the cigarettes, and asked, "Do you like panda? Because America gave two "ovibos-moschatus" to the Chinese people, so the Beijing Zoo would send two giant pandas to the American people." (H. Lin, L. Yu. Exposure of China's "Panda Diplomacy" [J]. Inheritance & Innovation, Vol.4(2010). Page16. (In Chinese)) Mrs. Nixon was pleased to hear the news and immediately told her husband, that Premier Zhou would give us two pandas.

According to the Los Angeles Times, in April 1972, the first day when pandas "Ling-Ling" and "Hsing-Hsing" arrived at the National Zoo in Washington, D.C., 20,000 people visited the zoo. The total number of visitors that year even reached 1.1 million. New York Times reporter John M. Broad once interviewed an official of the National Zoo on November 29, 1999, and the official said that the panda "Ling-Ling" and the panda "Hsing-Hsing" was visited by about 75 million tourists during their lifetime. This interview was widely reported by mainstream media such as "Washington post" and "New York times" in the United States. These two giant pandas lived until 1994 and 1999. Although they had babies, they all died unfortunately. When the panda "Ling-Ling" died, the Swiss-based World -Conservation Fund even lowered its flag at half mourning for the first time. In a word, all the evidence points to the undeniable fact that panda has an unprecedented influence in history.

In the following decades, the influence of panda is everywhere, not only in entertainment industry but also in culture. For example, the image of panda not only has appeared in zoo advertisements, but also has featured prominently in movies and the 2008 Beijing Olympics, and even in the world-famous virtual computer game --- "World of Warcraft". Besides, plenty of words are derived from pandas such as "Panda Hug" and "Kung Fu Panda". What's more, even during the trade war between China and the United States (2018-2019), according to my incomplete statistics, there are still at least 16 articles on foreign diplomacy on pandas, most of which related to the "Ling-Ling" and "Hsing-Hsing" pandas given by China to the United States in 1972. "These and other pandas have been a symbol of cultural collaboration between the two nations ever since, the zoo (National Zoo) said." (Sophie Lewis (AUGUST 29, 2019). "Could the trade war with China cost the U.S. its pandas?". CBS NEWS) It can be said that in the eyes of Americans, pandas have become synonymous with China in a subtle way. Nowadays, China has successfully won international reputation and goodwill from overseas public by promoting domestic panda protection. Under this circumstance, the Chinese government has now become an outstanding example of global "wildlife protection". To sum up, this kind of profound cultural output or the effect of public diplomatic dissemination such is beyond the reach of the Confucius Institute, CGTN or China Daily etc.

4. Limitations of Panda Diplomacy

Of course, everything has limitations, and "Panda Diplomacy" has no exception.

In the 1980s, China returned to the world stage through reform and opening-up and diplomatic success so as to attract global attention. In this case, panda diplomacy was therefore influenced by International conventions such as the "Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora", which forced China to announce that it would no longer give pandas to other countries as gifts for political exchanges since 1982, and would instead for "lease". In 2007, the state forestry administration announced that China would no longer give

away pandas to other countries, and would only carry out scientific research cooperation with foreign countries. Thus, “panda diplomacy” began a new “cooperative research mode”.

However, there still exists many problems in the development of panda diplomacy. The lend-lease mode, for example, to some extent adds to the financial burden of maintaining panda diplomacy. Take the United States as an example, it spends about \$500,000 to \$1 million a year on protection and scientific research on panda. Moreover, because of China’s traditional culture, China always sends out pandas in pairs, which is undoubtedly more of an economic pressure on the foreign countries. Even worse, some countries wanted pandas but were forced to give them up due to economic distress. As for the cooperative research mode, panda diplomacy has geographical limits. For example, Africa and other countries with perennial high temperatures are not suitable for the survival of pandas, so panda diplomacy cannot be carried out effectively in these countries and regions.

In addition to the two typical problems I have listed, some problems such as “China’s panda breeding is too for-profit”, “artificial breeding and releasing of giant pandas are unscientific and inhumane”, and “borrowing pandas is only to ensure the smooth development of foreign trade” also need to be properly handled and solved by the government.

5. Conclusion

Panda diplomacy has not only improved the overseas public’s understanding of China’s overall image, but also established a glorious image of the Chinese government engaged in wildlife protection. That is to say, panda diplomacy makes important contributions to the improvement of China’s national image.

Now, although panda diplomacy is less enthusiastic than it used to be, and there are certain limitations, it still retains influence. For example, the “panda house” at most

U.S. zoos still has a large wall with pictures and commentary explaining the history of China’s panda diplomacy. The national zoo in Washington, D.C., still displays the giant panda cage that President Richard Nixon brought from China in 1972, which is a great testament to the continuity of foreign policy. China’s research bases of giant panda have begun setting up microblogs, professional websites and even a channel called ‘iPanda’ to spread panda culture. This shows that in addition to the traditional forms of text and pictures, new publicity methods such as video and live broadcasting have been added to promote panda culture and its attraction.

In this regard, with the progress of modern technology, we should better use modern communication technology to tell the story of China, continue to work hard under the momentum of the successful panda diplomacy, and continue to deepen and develop new models of public diplomacy.

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