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PANDA DIPLOMACY: CHINA'S USE OF SOFT POWER TO INFLUENCE
THE WORLD

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By Anna Scout Reed

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for completion

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Abstract

Although giant pandas lack a long-standing history in Imperial China, they hold a strong connection to the Chinese Communist Party and Chinese Nationalism in the modern day. This research attempts to answer the question of whether giant pandas are an influential tool of soft power and achieve the purpose of promoting a “softer” image of China globally. Through a literature review and the method of a survey, research revealed that giant pandas are a successful tool of soft power. Overall animals serve a larger purpose in policy than simply a pet object. They can influence people and nations.

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I. Introduction

I first discovered my interest in giant pandas as a young child in 2003 when my father recorded the *Discovery Channel* documentary, *A Panda is Born*. Soon afterwards we visited Zoo Atlanta to see the giant pandas who had just arrived 3 years earlier in 1999, and I was hooked. I told everyone that I wanted to become a panda veterinarian, and learn Chinese so I could travel to China and study giant pandas. I could not be deterred that the giant panda was a superior animal, and the presence of giant pandas in the Beijing Olympics in 2008 only affirmed my interest in the black and white animal. In 2018 I had the opportunity to interact with a giant panda as a graduation present. This experience only confirmed my feelings that giant pandas are a distinctly “cute” and “fluffy” animal.

As revealed in a later survey, the American public does not disagree. In fact, the idea that China, an emerging superpower, might use these unassuming animals to promote its national image seems unimaginable. However, with the rise of American Zoological Institutions losing their panda loan programs, the question of whether the current state of affairs between China and the United States directly correlates with the removal of giant panda loans from United States zoological institutions. The question of whether or not giant pandas are an effective tool of soft power is the center question.

China has been expanding worldwide since the “transition to a market-oriented economy in 1979” (Lin 2011, 1). Since the 1980’s China has averaged a GDP growth of 9.9% over 30 years, and “in 2009 China overtook Japan as the world’s second largest economy” (Lin 2011, 1). Intensive language programs, such as the American government funded *Chinese Flagship* recognize the importance of Chinese as a critical language and the need for American students to serve as translators for national security. The Chinese National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign language also recognizes the importance and has an annual budget of \$200 million. In

2010 the CCP hoped to “have the number of foreigners speaking Chinese up to 100 million” by 2020 (Gill & Huang 2006, 18). These Chinese funded *Confucius Institutes* at various international college institutions attest to the fact that Chinese cultural programs are needed for American students to be successful on the global scene, as well as the Chinese interest in American academia. With the Chinese presence quickly expanding worldwide, the question of what avenues China uses to expand their image and power becomes increasingly important

Giant pandas as a tool diplomacy connects to the concept of soft power, or the “power of attraction” (Nye 2009, 18). Soft power is applied when nation states attempt to promote their own agenda through often unsuspecting and seemingly unrelated avenues (Nye 2008, 95) In line with the concept of soft power, animals can transcend stereotypical childish use and become communicative tools that nations can utilize to promote their agendas. The giant panda is a Chinese animal well known around the world and it is used as “a logo for a fast-food chain, a software program, a licorice company, and a nonprofit environmental company among others” (Songster 2018, 1). Can China change opinions and promote its agendas with these “cute,” charismatic animals, softening its Communist image? This is the question I attempt to answer.

China has implemented panda loan programs throughout the world with various zoological institutions and its government. The United States currently has three institutions that house giant panda loan programs. This research will gain a deeper understanding of what factors bring forth a diplomatic relationship and how China names a country worthy enough of receiving their national treasure. In addition, the question of how does the American public perceives the giant panda after they have visited one of these institutions will be explored through the methods of a survey in Chapter 3.

Giant pandas were relatively unheard of outside of China until 1869, with the arrival of more westerners into China (Nichols 2010, XI). The first Westerner to write about giant pandas was Armand David, a Catholic missionary, who sought to study nature in order to “glorify God” (Nichols 2010, 6). Surprisingly, giant pandas were a well-kept secret, even in Chinese culture (Nichols 2010, 4). There is not a single artistic rendition of the giant panda recorded until the 19th century, and were absent from most historical writings (Nichols 2010, 4). While there are some sources that mention animals that fit the giant panda’s description, there are often characteristics that don’t fit well with the giant panda in the same definitions. The absence of giant pandas in Chinese imperial history suggests that China chose a new national symbol, which differentiates the Chinese Communist party with their imperial past.

The Giant Panda as a National Symbol

While the general term for giant pandas is 大熊猫 (Dà Xióng Māo), traditionally the giant panda has had many different names based on region. The name 貔貅 (Pí Xiū) was coined by a tribe led by Huang Di, in which the giant panda was described as a “legendary animal” sent out alongside tigers and leopards to “defeat their rivals” (Lai & Olssen 2013, 11). Sima Qian’s *Book of History* cites the 貔貅 as being a “ferocious animal that made the perfect mascot to fire up warriors before battle” (Nichols 2010, 4). In the Zi Zhang period, (about 3000 years ago), panda hides were presented as “royal gifts, a symbol of victory” (Lai & Olssen 2013, 11). However, it is very odd to have the description of “ferocious” to describe giant pandas. Many scholars question whether the term was “over imaginative” or simply describing another animal (Nichols 2013, 4).

Many assumptions arise as to why giant pandas were not traditionally used in Chinese culture. One idea argues that their black and white coloring as a symbol of death suggested an air of bad luck to the Chinese people. Another indicates that their “docile and contented character is not inspirational as a mythical hero or god (Lai & Olssen 2013, 11).” However, most likely the giant panda was simply too elusive for most people to encounter. Many early 20th century explorers set out to find a giant panda, but even after searching for months remained unsuccessful. Ernest Henry Wilson, a naturalist, described the giant panda as the “sportsman’s prize” and recounts that he lived in the Sichuan Province searching for a giant panda for several months and “not so much as catch a glimpse of the giant panda” (Songster 2018, 17). In addition, the Sichuan Province is very harsh, and “savage of nature” makes the remote location even more difficult to find the animals (Songster 2018, 17). However, the lack of appearance in Chinese culture, is what appealed to Mao Zedong when he sought on a quest to find a national symbol during the Cultural revolution, a time when traditional imperial China was fully rejected (Songster 2018, 10).

The ancient Chinese name and characters for the giant panda (now called 熊猫 · or “bear cat”) is also heavily disputed. 獠 (Mo) and 驢虞 (Zou Yu) are two names for giant pandas in which many historians assume align with the description of the giant panda. The 獠 (Mo) creature is described as “living off bamboo,” but also as “ferocious,” which calls into question the validity of the claim because the description does fit that of a giant panda (Nichols 2010, 5). In addition, many descriptions of the 獠 (Mo) indicate that the animal had a “elephant trunk” which seem to align more with the Chinese tapir (Songster 2018, 15).

In contrast, the name 驢虞 (Zou Yu) has a greater possibility of being a giant panda as

the *Book of Odes* describes it as “a giant animal that could be as large as a tiger, that had white fur but was black in certain areas. It was not carnivorous and displayed a gentleness as well as a sense of trustworthiness” (Nichols, 2010, 5). During the West Jin Dynasty, the 驺虞 (Zou Yu) was used as a symbol of friendship between nations (Sina News 2021). In ancient wars 驺虞 (Zou Yu) flag would be raised to stop conflict, and request cooperation between nations (Sina News 2021).

The multiple accounts of possible names without a firm confirmation, emphasizes the mystery surrounding the giant panda in Imperial Chinese history. Furthermore, the “black and white bear is conspicuously absent from the records of China’s fauna that were detailed in the rich compendia of medical texts dating back from the Song Dynasty (960-1279)” (Songster 2018, 16).

Despite their mysterious past Communist China has promoted the giant panda as a national symbol. Prior to 1949, under Chiang Kai Shek’s rule, giant pandas were beginning to serve as symbols of gifts to other nations and free environmental study in China was possible. When the Communists took control in 1949, foreign involvement with giant pandas was regulated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (Nichols 2010, 75). The lack of prominence in Chinese Imperial culture drew the CCP to the giant panda. One of the goals of the CCP when it came to power was to transform the Beijing Zoo into a noteworthy institution in which to house the giant panda. With the advent of the Cold War the panda program was stalled.

Not only did the Great Leap forward reduce the birth rate and a decline in the human population rates in China, heavy deforestation occurred due to the increase in farming, and the panda habitat was quickly reduced. (Nichols 2010, 190). As a consequence of the rise in deforestation, the CCP set panda conservation goals under the Ministry of Forestry (Nichols

2010, 190). In modern China there are over 60 reserves, which cover 75% of panda habitat and ensure that the species has proper conservation (Nichols 2010, 191).

The term Panda Diplomacy was coined in the 1970's when the "Chinese government bestowed pairs of giant pandas as offerings of 'goodwill and friendship' to the people of the recipient country" (Songster 2018, 85). China created a diplomatic relationship with the United States after President Nixon's visit to China in 1972. Consequently, the giant panda pair Hsing-Hsing and Ling-Ling were sent to the United States as symbol of friendship in 1972 (Nichols 2010, 200).

During the 1970's China chose to give giant pandas to nations in which they did not have "state-appointed human ambassadors," because many nations "continued to recognize the Republic of China in Taiwan as the only official government of China" (Songster 2018, 85). Six years after receiving their first giant panda pair the United States made a historical decision. In December 1978 the United States announced that they would formally recognize the People's Republic of China, instead of the Republic of China in Taiwan (Smithsonian 2022). While the People's Republic of China could often be seen as "threatening" or "beguiling" the giant panda opened up a new avenue of diplomacy which China did not have access to before (Songster 2018, 84).

In the later 20th century, these "panda gifts" were transformed into "panda loan programs," in which International Zoological Institutions would receive the gift of a giant panda from China. However, these gifts were not free. The zoological institutions paid heavy fees for their care and even more if a cub was born in the facility. When Hua Mei was born at the San Diego Zoo in 1999, she became the first giant panda to be born in America and survive to adulthood. In the celebration of her birth, Hua Mei developed "three distinct identities: a

representative specimen of captive breeding science, a wild endangered species and a symbol of the distant People's Republic of China" (Songster 2018, 10).

Hypotheses:

Giant pandas are a form of soft power diplomacy by the Chinese government towards other nations. I hypothesize that Giant pandas are a successful attempt by China to soften their national image, especially to the American public.

If people do not associate giant pandas with China, then my hypothesis that giant pandas soften the Chinese national image is invalid. Do Americans identify giant pandas with China and how do giant pandas affect their attitudes toward the nation as a whole? Later in my thesis I will provide a survey of the American public in order to discover whether my hypothesis is correct.

Research Design:

I use the methods detailed below in order to gain an understanding if giant pandas are used as a form of Chinese soft power. Research from academic literature, books, and pop culture articles is the main composition of my thesis. First, I will define what soft power is and how it is used related to giant pandas in China. After a literature review of soft power, using qualitative research, I will provide an overview detailing giant panda history, their cultural standing within China, Chinese and global conservation efforts, and define "panda diplomacy."

After the historical overview, I present data from a survey of 101 participants to explore how the American public's opinion of China are tied to their opinion of giant pandas. With the approval of the IRB, I crafted a survey in which my topic of giant pandas and China was not directly obvious. I directly asked participants how they felt about the connection between giant

pandas and China using the animal to promote its national image

Outline:

In my research, I began with an introduction, how I became interested in the topic of giant pandas and China, a brief summary of my topic, including history and the rationale behind why Chinese diplomacy and soft power usage is important, and giant panda history in China. I chose to clearly state my hypothesis, and then chose to use a literature review in order to expand upon the definitions which are important to my thesis. After providing a clear definition of soft power, I then described other forms of Chinese soft power, animal global diplomacy, and finally panda diplomacy. After the literature review, I chose to use a survey, in order to gain an understanding of the public's attitude toward China, and see if giant pandas had the ability to soften the Chinese image from the American perspective. After describing my findings, I will conclude whether or not giant pandas are a successful attempt by the Chinese government to soften the Chinese national image to the American eye.

II. Literature Review

The giant panda pair Ling-Ling and Hsing-Hsing were first given to the United States, after a Richard Nixon visit to Peking when his wife, Patricia Nixon told Chinese premier, Zhou Enlai of her “fondness” for the black and white animal (Smithsonian 2022). While China had a past of providing panda “gifts” to other nations, the significance of the gesture was relatively unknown (Songster 84, 2018). While President Nixon hoped to cultivate a “fresh start” with China, and encourage cooperation between the two nations, the symbolism between the diplomatic gift was not heavily emphasized in the media and the concept of soft power was not defined until the 1990’s (Warner 2007, 765). However, since the appearance of giant pandas into many international zoological institutions and the strategic diplomatic gift of giant pandas to Taiwan in 2008, the idea that giant pandas can be used as a diplomatic tool of soft power can be explored.

Power is as “the ability or capability to do something,” a “position of control,” and “political, social, or financial influence” (Fan 2008, 148). The term soft power, coined by Joseph Nye in the late 1980’s, also has a broad definition as the “power of attraction.” The role of soft power is an ongoing debate in Chinese society, as the Chinese “mainstream intellectual view is that culture is the core resource of a state’s power” (Glaser & Murphey 2009, 10). Political scientists refer to soft power as China’s “charm offensive,” and predict that it will have major implications on the western world (Glaser & Murphey 2009, 11).

Joseph Nye introduced the concept of soft power in 1990 as the power of “getting others to want what you want” through tangible resources such as “culture, ideology, and institutions” (Ding 2019, 24). Nye argued that, with the end of World War II, the “definition of power is

losing its emphasis on military force and conquest.” Other factors such as technology, education, and economic resources are gaining significance (Nye 1990, 154). After expanding upon the theory in 2013, Nye attributed “culture,” “political values,” and “foreign policies” as the “three resources” in which soft power rests in a nation state (Ryoko & Yujie Zhu 2020, 9). While the significance of military power is not decreasing, international foreign policy must begin to “accept the limitations” of military force and emphasize the idea of “interdependence” (Nye 1990, 156). Modern foreign policy is shifting to encompass more than just states with military strength, large populations and economic stability, but entities such as transnational corporations that lack military power but have larger gross national production than many nations (Edney 2012, 900).

Interdependence ties into the concept of soft power as it is not “harmony,” but instead “unevenly balanced mutual dependence,” often gained through avenues of soft power, such as economics or trade (Nye 1990, 157). Political leaders promote interdependence through institutional linkages, hoping that weaker states will become dependent upon them. Interdependence is just one way that power has moved away from traditional military hard power. While many states still rely on large nations, such as the American-Israeli relationship, for military protection, “transnational actors, nationalism in weak states, the spread of technology, and changing political issues,” have caused soft power to arise as well (Nye 1990, 160). As China has continually strengthened in power during the “contemporary age,” many argue that interdependence has caused a decrease in “state autonomy” (Ding 2019, 25).

For example, China has a growing interdependent relationship with Africa. When Ethiopia went to war with a neighboring country in the 1990’s, while the United States chose to “reduce diplomatic presence” in Ethiopia, China responded by “dispatching more diplomats,

businessmen, engineers, and teachers” (Gill & Huang 2006, 25). Since increasing presence, and providing stability during the crisis, Chinese companies have become a “dominant force” in Ethiopia (Gates and Huang 2006, 25). The Ethiopian-Chinese relationship is not unique. From 2000 to 2007, trade between Africa and China increased from \$10 billion US dollars to \$70 billion US dollars due to Chinese support in the area (Chaponniere 2009, 9).

Culture is a good source of soft power, because “soft power is only achieved when other nations admire and want to emulate aspects of that nations’ civilizations” (Gill & Huang, 2006, 17). With and the opening, and reform of China in the post-Mao era, Chinese culture has been allowed to flourish, and gained international attention (Gill & Huang 2006, 17). Aspects of Chinese culture align well with soft power, because it aligns well with traditional Chinese beliefs such as Confucianism and Daoism (Glaser & Murphey 2009, 3). In addition, the soft power concept arose to the political science stage during a time of growth and exploration for China politically (Glaser & Murphey 2009, 3).

Most political scientists adopt this “cultural soft power” approach when relating to China, however, in the broader sense it can encompass any “non-military power” (Vuving 2009, 3). While power is “always realized with the use of some resource,” the same resource does have the ability to produce hard and soft power (Vuving 2009, 4). For example, moral values can be used to persuade someone to personally agree, or force someone to conform to the moral standard. Vuving argues that there should be a “distinction between *power resources* and *power currencies*,” and are different based on the derivative of both sources (Vuving 2009, 5). Power currencies can “generate attraction” and create a softer image through qualities such as “beauty, brilliance, and benignity” (Vuving 2009, 8). One can command soft power through gratitude, admiration, inspiration and even sympathy, creating feelings of relatability. Cultural and

language programs such as the Chinese *Confucius Institutes* are examples of soft power currencies. Instead of producing power “directly,” they “promote understanding, and nurture a positive image” of a nation. The beauty within a foreign language and culture are easily attractive and culture has a positive connotation with the source country (Vuving 2009, 13). In the United States there are more than 40 Confucius Institutes and over 260 worldwide (Glaser & Murphey 2009, 16).

When a nation institutes soft power, most use “propaganda and public diplomacy” in order to develop power within the nation (Edney 2012, 901). Public diplomacy can be instituted in “daily government communications,” “elite-level information exchanges” and “long lasting relationships with important individuals” (Edney 2012, 902). Since China’s government is heavily propaganda based, they cannot get other nations to follow their government based soft power efforts. However, the giant panda being an instrument of the government’s image such as in the Beijing 2008 and the Beijing 2022 winter Olympics, perhaps China is turning to even “softer” uses of soft power.

Soft Power in China

China rapidly became interested in developing soft power after Nye defined the term in 1990. Wang Huning, deputy director of the Policy Research Office of the Communist Party from 2012 to the present, is cited with providing the first article on soft power under Hu Jintao (Glaser & Murphey 2009, 12). While in the United States Nye’s views were not unanimously agreed upon, in China they gained popularity because of the ability to use Chinese culture in soft power. In addition, the theory rose to prominence during a period of growth and expansion of ideas. Traditional Confucianism emphasizes moral forces over physical ones, suggesting that

Chinese culture would favor a system that promotes their ideas in a way that is not physically draining (Glasser & Murphey 2009, 12). Moreover, in the 1990's the Chinese government looked for ways to ensure that China rose to become an international power, but avoided the fate of the Soviet Union in 1991. In fact, political scientists from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences blame the fall of the Soviet Union on their lack of soft power resources (Glasser & Murphey 2009, 13). While at first Joseph Nye did not believe China could successfully use soft power because of their "immature cultural industry and lack of freedom and political corruption" (Meng 2012, 10). However, he retracted this statement with the rise in popularity of basketball player Yao Ming and the academically challenging Confucius Institutes only a year later (Meng 2012, 10).

"Cultural Diplomacy" is a term coined by Milton Cummings, an American political scientist, and can be defined as the "exchange of ideas information and aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding" (Ang, Isar & Mar 2015, 367). "Chinese cultural weeks" in large cities around the world are an example of cultural diplomacy, and are used in order to "promote understanding in Chinese culture" in ways that are not "politically controversial so they can be accepted" (Meng 2012, 13). Culturally, the Chinese government often plays on the ideas of "development, stability, and harmony," within its political system. The CCP has quickly transformed the surface of its government to be a part of a "harmonious society and a harmonious world" (Glasser & Murphey 2009, 14). Soft power aligns with a "harmonious society," because of the lack of violence and military force it involves (Glasser & Murphey 2009, 14).

Cultural practices such as Tai Chi Chuan, kung fu, and ping pong are all examples of Chinese cultural soft power prominent in the United States and elsewhere (Meng Meng 2012,

15). The term “Ping Pong diplomacy” rose to popularity and “focuses on ping pong matches between Chinese and United States teams during the 1970s” (Devoss 2014). While “in the West sports were entertainment, all forms of culture became political in China” (Griffin 2014, 1). Ping Pong was founded by an English Communist Ivor Montagu, who “convinced his sport could spread Communism throughout the world,” eventually “engineered the sport’s path to Mao’s China” (Griffin 2014, 2). At the 1969 Ping Pong World Championships in Japan, the United States players formed a friendship with the Chinese players and received a national invite to visit China afterwards (Devoss 2014).

China strategically invited the US players because of tensions with the Soviet Union at the Russian-Chinese border, in which they hoped to gain American support (Devoss 2014). At the end of the ping-pong players visit, Premier Zhou Enlai, described the “opening of a new page for the Chinese and American people” (Devoss 2014). After the visit, Nixon removed a 20-year embargo on China, and future president Gerald Ford described ping-pong as an “outside force that shook up State Department bureaucrats and their static view of the world” (Devoss 2014). The implications of soft power in the form of ping-pong, changed US-Chinese relations, and revealed that “the role of ordinary people and small incidents cannot be underestimated or ignored because a small ‘butterfly’ may change the direction of foreign relations” (Yi & Zhaohui 2000, 430).

The use of culture as a form of soft power by China has been heavily influenced by the United States combination of soft power and Western influence. Despite years where America has financial hardships or situations where its democratic ideals have not aided them in foreign policy, Western cultural items such as Coca Cola, Krispy Kreme, and Hollywood remain strong (Glassar & Murphey 2009, 14). Fast food chains such as McDonalds were able to overcome

skepticism towards Western culture, to full acceptance.

Another example of American soft power is the humanitarian aid it offers countries during natural disasters. For example, the humanitarian aid provided by the United States to Indonesia after the 2004 tsunami, improved the image of the United States as a friendly state, even as the Invasion of Iraq had heavily negatively impacted its image in previous years (Vuving 2009, 15).

Similar to the United States China has increased their aid to Africa, while building a strong economic relationship in the continent. While the extent of aid to Africa remains relatively unknown because China keeps “no statistics on its aid” and will simply hold press releases once they have provided ministerial visits to the African country (Chaponniere 2009, 56). Chinese state-owned enterprises travel to Africa in order to “assure the supply of raw materials” for the CCP, while private Chinese companies enter Africa because they “see opportunity and fear cut-throat competition in the Chinese market” (van Dijk 2009, 11)

There are some criticisms of Nye’s widely accepted views on soft power. Nye’s idea of soft power assumes that there is a “link between attractiveness and the ability to influence others in international relations” (Fan 2019, 148). However, states have “multiple actors” that can be attracted to things in various ways, as well as many “rational” decisions that have little use for the “power of attraction” (Fan 2018, 148). Building upon this idea, “nation branding” has arisen amidst soft power discussions as “a nation’s efforts to communicate to people in other countries” (Fan 2018, 150). Nation branding asserts that soft power is more of a marketing strategy rather than a form of political prowess. However, the CCP government as a whole accepted the idea of cultural soft power in order to influence other nations.

Nye describes the current age as an “Age of Information,” in which “when people are

overwhelmed with the volume of information confronting them it is hard to know what to focus on. Attention rather than information becomes the scarce resource, and those who can distinguish evaluate information from background clutter gain power” (Nye 2008, 100). China has the “foreign propaganda policy” which controls what information is spread to the rest of the world (Edney 2012, 902).

China is one of the biggest technological centers on earth, so it is natural that they can effectively use soft power to propel their image. Technology is one of the easiest ways to promote “public diplomacy,” a term first used in 1965 by Edmund Gullion (Xing 2010, 11). Public diplomacy is used alongside soft power and “deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies,” by “cultivating by governments public opinions in other countries,” “interacting with private groups and interests in one country with another,” and “reporting foreign affairs and its impact on policy” (Xing 2010, 11). Public diplomacy makes other nations' political ideologies more attractive “by approaching foreign audiences in a more sophisticated way” that gives a “positive public opinion that serves to prompt favorable government policies targeted countries” (Xing 2010, 12).

China has taken to promoting public diplomacy on the internet which “aligns with the government’s pursuit of ‘innovation and improvement of online propaganda’ to ‘guide public opinion’” (Huang, 2020, 5). Engagement on the internet can control emotions, behavior, and actions. The PRC has taken on internet diplomacy, in the sense that the Chinese government attempts to “minimize the negative emotional content via censorship” (Huang 2020, 5), while at the same time quickly moving away from their “rigid propagandistic styles” of the past and looking into softer ways to gain sympathy for the Party’s agenda (Huang, 2020, 5).

In this way the Chinese government has begun to release “panda-themed tweets” which

align with the ideas of soft power and panda diplomacy (Huang 2020, 1). While twitter is banned for regular citizens in China, the government has some platforms that mimic the twitter concept. A study by Zhao Alexander Huang and Rui Wang in 2020 confirmed that these tweets “promote and strengthen not only Sino-foreign relations using digital public diplomacy, but also show that Chinese media follow the principles of constructive journalism to transfer positive emotions” (Huang 2020, 1) to target international attention. While the Chinese government has taken to using pandas in the media to appear less politicized, in contrast pandas are a “highly politicized” tool which “implicitly promote China’s policies” (Huang 2020, 19). The PRC government uses “childish expressions to create naive and cute ‘panda talk’ to implicitly convey their true actions and positions” (Huang 2020, 19).

Joseph Nye argues that “actions need to reinforce words,” making it more interesting that while China may be successful in promoting a cute, fluffy, animal to the world, they are not necessarily backing up a friendly image with their actions. Since “much of the giant panda’s potency as a diplomatic tool is directly related to its appealing appearance,” and the chance of seeing a giant panda in the wild “exists only within the territorial borders of China” they are the perfect tool in which to promote a unassuming, unique national image (Songster 2018, 85).

According to Yi Xing, panda diplomacy is a “public diplomacy instrument that enables the Chinese government to reach overseas audiences in hopes of projecting a positive national image of China and increasing its publicity among the foreign public” (Xing 2010, 24). Overall, this is an extension of the idea of “animal diplomacy” that many countries have used for centuries.

Animal Diplomacy and Soft Power

Falk Hartig describes the term “animal diplomacy” as the “use of live native fauna...for diplomatic purposes,” and to most importantly “increase repute and standing” (Hartig 2013, 52). Animal diplomacy can be used much more effectively than other cultural diplomacies because it does not have the language barrier that other diplomacies require (Xing 2010, 24). Hartig describes three different forms of animal diplomacy: gifts, diplomatic gestures, and the loan of animals (Hartig 2013, 53). In order to fully be successful, the animal must have a positive “visual identity” and easy “natural distribution” in order to “win hearts” for diplomatic use (Hartig 2013, 55). In order for an animal to be functional in influencing the actions of others, they must have traits that “make them cute in most people’s perception” and can attract the attention of the media (Hartig 2013, 55).

Konrad Lorenz proposed the notion of “*kindchenschema*,” (baby schema), which is a “set of infantile physical features such as a large head, round face, and big eyes that is perceived as cute and motivates caretaking behavior in other individuals, with the evolutionary function of enhancing offspring survival (Glocker, 2009, 1). Giant pandas have all of these features which gain human attraction. Ramona and Desmond Morris argue that giant panda features such as their “flat face that resembles human beings, large eyes, which give the panda an innocent child-like quality, small tail, and the ability to sit up vertically and manipulate small objects” makes them appear child-like and therefore more attractive to humans (Xing 2010, 26). Humans have “subconscious preference” for “neoteny or craving for parental care,” which the cute, child-like aspects of the giant panda highlight and allow “affection for pandas to extend beyond age and demographic boundary” (Xing 2010, 27). In addition, the fact that giant pandas are only found in China, emphasizes their uniqueness and that China holds all control when they are shared to

the world.

Most recently, of 冰墩墩 Bing Dun Dun, the panda face of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics has emphasized the idea of *kindchenschema* and the child-like component of giant pandas. Bing (冰) means “ice,” and dun dun (墩墩) means “robust, and lively, and also represents children” (Olympics 2020). The Chinese Olympic committee wanted a mascot that heavily appealed to children, so it is unsurprising that they chose the national symbol of China to do so (Olympics). Xi Jinping in a speech after the 2022 Winter Olympic opening ceremonies described Bing Dun Dun as a “smart” way of “reflecting Chinese culture” with her “lively and honest personality” (Xinhua 2022). This reinforces the idea that China is aware that they can use the giant panda as an honest image, appealing to younger generations.

While many sources state that there are some recordings of giant pandas being “gifted” to Japan as early as the Tang Dynasty, ultimately giant pandas were not used as diplomatic gifts until the 1940’s. (Xing, 2010, 25). The Tang Era legend states that “sole female monarch” of the Tang Dynasty (618-907) Wu Zetian, allegedly sent giant pandas to the Japanese emperor (Songster 2018, 86). However, the “Tang-Era gift” appears to be a case of “misinterpreted text,” but emphasizes the fact that “people within and without China, desire to add legitimacy and mystique to current practices” of panda diplomacy (Songster 2018, 87).

Marcel Mauss, a French anthropologist describes “bonds made through gifts is what keeps societies together,” and what better gift is that of something so “curious” as an animal? (Leira & Neumann, 2016, 9). Internationally, the use of “animals as diplomatic gifts can be traced back several centuries” (Hartig 2013, 53). The “exchange of gifts between rulers is a long-standing tradition,” as many European leaders hoped to establish large animal collections as a display of their power (Stahlberg & Svanberg 2016, 1). “Animals can serve as a marker of status among

elites,” and the “quality of animals as important symbols is one of the reasons that they have been used quite frequently as diplomatic gifts” (Leira and Neumann 2016, 3).

Ancient Egypt is cited as the first nation to use animal diplomacy, enabling “less developed states to influence their more powerful counterparts” (Hartig 2013, 53). Animals as gifts became strategic moves politically because they served as “prestigious objects” and “status symbols” for both religious and political leaders (Hartig 2013, 53). Emperor Charlamagne is known for his large animal collections, and received many presents from leaders outside of Europe, such as the Caliph of Baghdad Harun al-Rashid who gifted him with an Asian elephant (Stahlberg & Svanberg 2016, 2). While at first exchanges such as the famous white elephant gift from Portuguese King Manuel I to Pope Leo X in 1592, can be described as “ruler-to-ruler diplomacy,” overall these animals also made a “lasting impression” on the citizens of the receiving nation as well (Hartig 2013, 53).

The Medici giraffe gifts between Egypt and Europe in the 15th and 19th centuries share similar characteristics with the panda gifts between the United States and China in the 1970’s. The Medici Giraffe was presented to Lorenzo de’ Medici by the sultan of Egypt, in an attempt by the Egyptian ruler to “establish good relations with the Florentines in order to make them intervene on their behalf in the inter-Muslim conflict” (Hartig 2013, 54). In the same way the giant panda caused great excitement and media attention when it first arrived to the United States, the giraffe once in Florence was “eulogized by poets, immortalized by paintings,” and had the “adulation of the crowds” everywhere it went (Hartig 2013, 54).

Australia attempted to use animal diplomacy in the 20th century, as “long isolation had left it with many unique animals which could have been selected for diplomatic overtures” (Cushing 2009). Their choice animal, the duckbill platypus is “often considered to be the

strongest” of animals and are very difficult to keep alive in captivity which emphasized their rarity and exclusivity to living on mainland Australia (Cushing 2009). While duckbill platypus’ do not have the cult following giant pandas have obtained, they were successful in cultivating nationalism in Australia because they were “distinct and naturally occurring in the donor country” which is the “nexus between the image of animals and successful animal diplomacy rests on how directly and explicitly the two could be associated to each other” (Xing 2010, 28).

Panda Diplomacy

In the twentieth century giant pandas quickly became a source of national pride, and China was able to “monopolize” panda diplomacy. The term “panda nation” was coined in the 1950’s with the arrival of the first giant panda to the Beijing Zoo (Songster 2018, 5). As the animal was cute, the Communist government used giant pandas in mass education and was heavily used in science education programs. “Sending” pandas to other nations aimed to “bring a strong ideological commitment and sincere friendship to the foreign audience and get China high in the target country’s political and diplomatic agenda” (Xing 2010, 32). After World War II, China immediately sent the United States pandas to improve ties, and shared them with the Soviet Union in the 1950’s to “underpin their communist brotherhood,” and gain support that was eventually “crucial for Beijing’s survival” (Xing 2010, 32).

The Deng Xiaoping Era, often known as the “Era of Internationalization,” was when the use of pandas as modern gifts to other nations began. In addition, the idea that “nature belonged not only to the Communist state,” began to emerge during this era, increasing a spirit of environmentalism within the communist country (1978-1989). When China gifted the panda pair to President Nixon to create “favorable public opinion” to the “improving relationship between China and its former adversaries,” this revealed the notion that China felt as if they could rebuild

crumbling relationships with their gifts and diplomacy (Xing 2010, 32). Their plan was successful, as the United States formally recognized the People's Republic of China in 1979 instead of formerly recognized Republic of China (Taiwan) (Smithsonian).

The "Flowering Bamboo Crisis of 1983" led to a reduced panda population, as well as the end of the Chinese panda gifting program (Songster 2018, 105). Although the flowering bamboo is a natural occurrence in the Sichuan Province, flowering causes the "death of many stalks" which depletes giant panda food sources (Songster 2018, 106). Reduction in numbers led to panda conservation became the "responsibility of the entire nation," and a transition from trapping pandas in the wild to looking for ways to preserve them in captivity (Songster 2018, 7).

In the mid 1990's the panda "gifts" were transformed into panda "loans." China began to see the animals as a source of income. Hartig describes giant pandas as being an effective source of soft power because of their exclusivity to China as well as attractiveness. Giant pandas can be described as cute and unaggressive, a perfect national symbol. These panda "loans" encompass a "lease system where the recipient would pay a fixed rate (for the United States this is USD\$1million) per year for a specified period (Ding 2019, 149). The loan system "builds the trust, communication, and cooperation necessary to develop a mutual partnership between China and the recipient country" and studies have revealed that there is a correlation between the "number of pandas China leases to a country and its significance as China's trade partner (Ding 2019, 150).

The strategic choice by China to place giant pandas into "the most high-profile zoos in foreign countries," should not be forgotten. Giant pandas are associated with zoological institutions worldwide which are institutions based on fun and conservation. Instead of choosing a national image that is serious, pandas add a new dimension to an already positive, thriving

scene. The “target audience of a zoo is not limited to people with special knowledge” or age and is visited by all kinds of people in various “social strata” (Xing 2010, 29). This allows giant pandas to appear “mainstream” inserting foreign influence in a way that is not easily accomplished by any other entity (Xing 2010, 29). The “panda-monium” that has been created by giant pandas in zoological institutions makes the “overseas public intrigued” the panda “motherland,” and provides China with a “willing” foreign audience (Xing 2010, 30).

The negotiations for these “panda loan programs” in high profile zoos, requires that all of the Zoological institutions that house pandas to pay \$500 thousand US dollars a year, per panda, to China (The Smithsonian Institution 2013, 2). In return, the institution will receive a panda, often a breeding pair, under the condition that they remain property of China and that they can be sent home at any time. China describes the breakdown of the funds they receive as 70% used towards “conservation of the giant panda in China,” 20% is given to the Woolong Conservation Center, and 10% is given to the “Chinese Party as part of its project management fees and expenses” (The Smithsonian Institution 2013, 3). Zoological institutions such as Zoo Atlanta must provide the best care possible to the Chinese animals.

The panda programs between China and these institutions requires heavy cooperation and planning. A report from the 2011 panda agreement from the National Zoo in Washington D.C, describes the loan as the “Chinese party shall distribute projects based on relevant regulations in China and for the sake of giant panda conservation.” In addition, the success of the panda pair in the United States would be reevaluated each year by the CCP based on breeding success (The Smithsonian Institution 2003, 3). Moreover, every time a panda is transported between China and the United States the American Zoo must pay life insurance, \$1 million US dollars per panda. (The Smithsonian Institution 2003, 3). While Zoo Atlanta prides

themselves as having donated over \$16 million to panda conservation, the majority of the money is being donated to the CCP, who then puts the funds back into panda conservation.

A review of Zoo Atlanta's panda program in 2003, described the Zoo Atlanta Giant Panda Conservation Center goals as "to facilitate a variety of research projects, provide the best possible environment for the pandas, and offer visitors educational opportunities to increase their awareness of giant panda conservation issues and inspire awe for the species" (Wilson 200, 367). While the American Zoos are equipped to provide the best care possible, if a "risky procedure" needs to take place, such as anesthesia for veterinary care, a Chinese professional must be flown in to take part in the procedure (The Smithsonian Institution 2003, 4). While it appears that a Zoo has a lot of control of the pandas under their care, it is very apparent in the agreement that they are borrowed property of the CCP.

In December 2020, the National Zoo announced that despite very successful breeding programs, all pandas at the Smithsonian institution would be returning back to China in 2023. While there were multiple claims that the announcement came after rising tensions with China, the Zoo Director, Steve Monfort, made it clear in his confidence that another panda pair would return to the zoo despite rising tensions (Ruane 2020). However, the panda programs at the Memphis and Atlanta Zoos have not been canceled, and the Canada program was canceled in 2020 shortly before the National Zoo's announcement (Ruane 2020).

While every nation's relationship with China is very important, none is more distinct or tense as that with Taiwan. Panda diplomacy plays an important role in "Beijing's national reunification strategy that specifically aims at Taiwanese society" (Xing 2010, 32). While China would not necessarily consider any relationship with Taipei as diplomacy because they already "claim the island as part of the PRC," they have deployed panda diplomacy in order to hopefully

“soften” Taiwan’s “hostile attitude” towards the PRC (Xing 2010, 33).

In 2005, China “offered” Taiwan two pandas, Tuan-Tuan and Yuan-Yuan. Taiwan “rejected” the offer because the “pandas’ names are a play on the Chinese word for not only *unity* but also *reunion*” (Ding 2019, 148). While Taiwan accepted the offer in 2008 because their government hoped to strengthen ties with China, this “highlighted the effect of domestic political developments on international diplomacy” (Ding 2019, 150). The “evolution in the diplomatic significance of China’s pandas,” especially in their role in the tense relationship with Taiwan, “suggest that panda diplomacy is now manifesting hard power rather than soft power” (Ding 2019 151).

III. Survey Data Collection

While there is strong evidence that China uses giant pandas to attempt to soften its national image. A survey is the best way to provide insight into what the common American feels about giant pandas. If people do not associate giant pandas with China, then the hypothesis that giant pandas are an effective avenue to soften the Chinese national image is invalid. Furthermore, if people do not believe that giant pandas are as attractive or “cute,” as it appears, then the idea that China can use giant pandas to soften their image is invalid. Using the research method of a survey will accurately attempt to represent the feelings of the common public.

The survey was shared on social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook to gather a wide range of ages and demographics. Overall, 101 recorded responses were received. Primarily, the demographic trended on the younger side, however the second largest category was an older population. One aspect of the survey that could have been improved was the age demographic question. In order to have retrieved more accurate age data, the survey should have stated the categories as 18-22 and then 23-30. 50% of survey respondents were 18-22 years old, while 25% were in the 40 and older category.

In addition, the survey demographic was primarily white. In theory, a more diverse survey would have provided a broader width of opinions as well as depth to the research. This would have made the survey more representative of the United States population as a whole. Concerning the amount of knowledge of Chinese culture the respondents held, 68% answered that they had basic knowledge of Chinese culture, and 21% answering that they had no knowledge of Chinese culture.

One of the first questions within the survey asked what the participants' level and knowledge of Chinese culture. Out of 101 respondents, 66 felt as if they had basic knowledge of

Chinese culture, followed by another 24 who felt that they have no knowledge of Chinese culture. 91% of participants have not traveled to China. This revealed that while the participants had little knowledge of China in the whole, they could easily have misconceptions and preconceived notions which could affect their responses. This provided a limitation on the survey, because the majority of the participants did not have knowledge on Chinese culture, they had little knowledge in which to base their opinions. However, since the majority of the American public has limited knowledge on Chinese culture, this limitation highlighted the fact that even people with little knowledge of China have been influenced by giant pandas.

Within the survey, various aspects of Chinese culture distractors were included in order to leave respondents without knowledge that the topic behind the thesis survey was “panda diplomacy.” The first question pertaining to Chinese culture asked participants if they had ever celebrated Chinese Lunar New Year. The results concluded that 61% had never celebrated Chinese New Year even once. This question was included in the survey because Chinese New Year celebrations often provide a different perspective to Chinese culture and often soften the Chinese image.

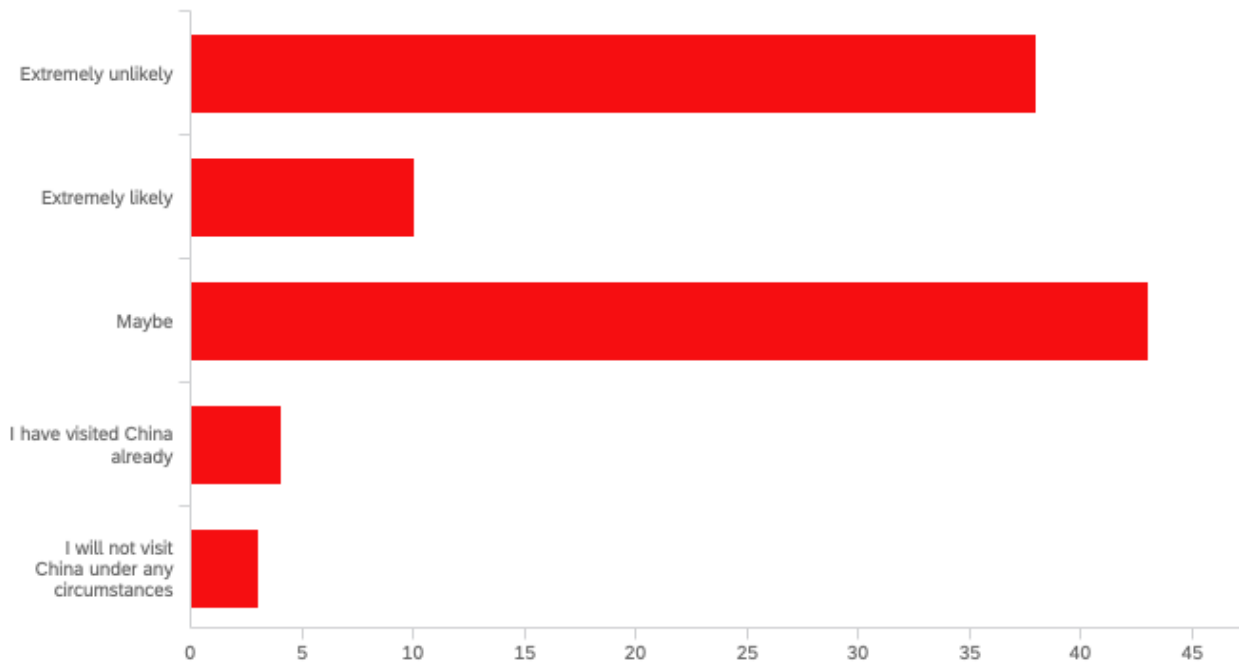
However, there did not appear to be a connection between celebrating Chinese New Year and the amount of knowledge of Chinese culture that participants believed that they held. Interestingly, it was expected that there would be a connection between people who had an at least basic knowledge of Chinese culture, and if they had celebrated Chinese New Year. Around 65% who responded that they had a basic knowledge of Chinese culture, had never celebrated Chinese New Year. This could be interpreted that people believe that they are more knowledgeable about Chinese culture than they actually are. Even out of those who claimed to

have “high” or “most knowledge” of Chinese culture, only 54% said that they had celebrated Chinese New Year at least once.

Knowledge of Chinese Culture:	Have Celebrated Chinese New Year:	Have Never Celebrated Chinese New Year:
Basic Knowledge:	23 respondents	43 respondents
High Knowledge of Chinese Culture	6 respondents	5 Respondents

Traveling to a nation can change perspective and opinions about a place. When asked about visiting China, 91% of respondents recorded that they had never visited China.

Furthermore, when asked if they would visit China in the future 44% of respondents said “maybe,” drawing the conclusion that many people have something holding them from visiting the country as a whole. One hypothesis as to why one would not have the opportunity to visit China is cost. There are many places that people would like to travel to, but they do not have unlimited funds to do so. In addition, Covid-19 has heavily impacted international travel. The figure below, shows the responses when participants were asked if they were likely to visit China in the future:



While there are a variety of reasons as to why someone would think it is unlikely that they might visit China (monetary funds, lack of interest in East Asian culture, fear of travel), one can hypothesize that tensions with China play a role in these answers.

One question that would have increased the brevity of the survey, was a question about perceptions of tensions between the United States and China. This question this would have been useful to see if people would have been more interested in traveling to China if the political tensions were not as high.

Within the survey questions about both dragons (another traditional symbol of Chinese culture) and giant pandas were asked in order to compare the feelings of Americans towards both animals, and see if people did commonly associate giant pandas with China. If only questions about giant pandas were asked, the answers were more likely to trend towards giant pandas and a softened Chinese national image. While dragons are a mythical creature, they were the only

Chinese symbol to have the breadth and popularity to giant pandas. In the future, perhaps a better way to phrase the question, would have been to say Chinese “symbol,” instead of “animal.”

While Snow Leopards and golden snub-nosed monkeys are less known Chinese animals, the *Disney* movie *Born in China*, details the stories of three of the most prominent Chinese animals: the snow leopard, the giant panda, and the golden snub-nosed monkey.

Animal:	Snow Leopards	Dragons	Giant Pandas	Golden Snub-Nosed Monkeys
Number of Respondents:	1	17	83	0

As predicted 83% of participants related giant pandas to China, while 16% felt that dragons were more relatable. This is a step forward to proving my hypothesis because if people did not associate giant pandas with China, then they could not soften their national image.

In the final questions, participants were asked to specifically to compare giant pandas and dragons, and their attitudes towards the two national symbols. Since survey participants obviously believed that giant pandas were heavily related to China, it was not surprising when over 68% of participants labeled giant pandas as “very cute.” While it seems childish to think of an animal as “cute,” this is center of the thesis question, and it could not be overlooked in the survey.

When analyzing survey data, the comparison of participants knowledge of Chinese culture to whether or not respondents chose giant pandas as the animal most related to China was emphasized. If less knowledge correlated with the choice of giant pandas and dragons, then perhaps the presence of giant pandas had spread to every corner of the American population.

Overall, most participants simply felt giant pandas were more synonymous with China. While 20% of respondents with “basic” knowledge of Chinese culture responded that they associate dragons the most with Chinese culture, none of the respondents that had “high” or “most knowledge” of Chinese culture responded with “dragons.” The data reveals, that high knowledge of Chinese culture is not necessary in order to know about giant pandas. This is conclusive with the hypothesis that China has been successful in promoting the giant panda with the “common” American.

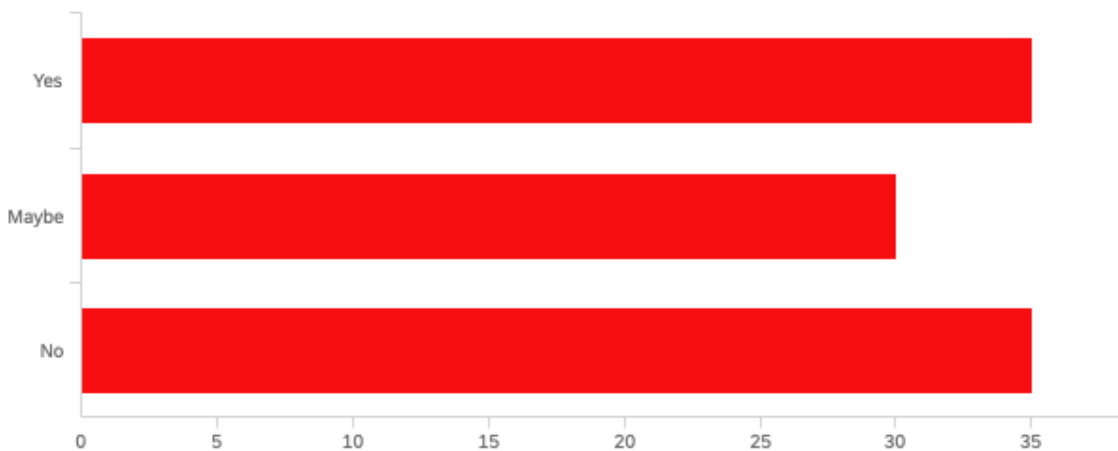
	High Knowledge of Chinese Culture:	Basic Knowledge of Chinese Culture:
Dragons:	0	13
Giant Pandas:	8	53

One aspect of giant pandas in the United States is their presence in American zoological institutions. A question concerning whether or not a person had seen a giant panda in a zoological institution is important, because it is easier to become more connected or attracted to animals that one has seen in person. While it was not surprising that 70% of respondents had seen a giant panda in a zoological institution, 19% of respondents did not know if they had or not. While there are currently only 3 zoos in the United States that house pandas (Zoo Atlanta, the Memphis Zoo, and the National Zoo in Washington D.C), each of these institutions heavily promote their giant panda programs. In fact, in the early 2000s many zoos required extra fees in order to view the giant panda collection.

One limitation to the survey is that the majority of respondents were social media followers. Since many of the responders were most likely from the Southeast, it was more likely

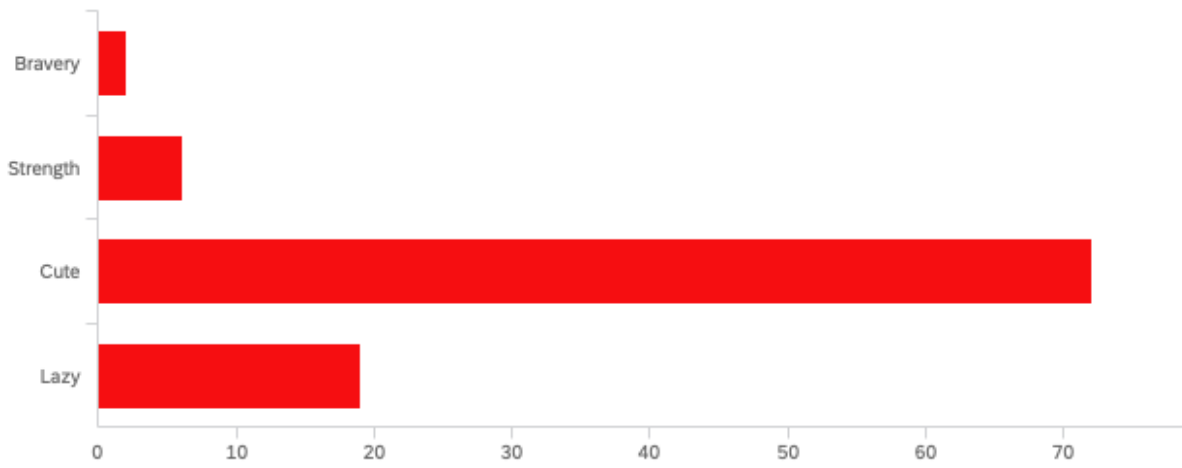
that they had seen a giant panda in a Zoological institution since all 3 institutions with pandas are in the southeast.

The Chengdu Conservation Center allows guests to have 1-2 minutes of playtime with a giant panda for a steep price. The next survey question sought to discover if the prospect of being able to hold a giant panda (despite the cost) would impact people’s attitudes towards giant pandas. In the data, 65% of respondents answered “yes” or “maybe” they would be interested in visiting China if there was the prospect of getting to hold a giant panda involved. While 35% of respondents said that this would not change their decision, the other 65% could be swayed into visiting China. However, 82% of participants recorded that they would never or that it was highly unlikely that they would be willing to visit China. From this data, one can conclude that giant pandas can sway some and change opinions, at least towards the opportunity of visiting the country.



The final question pertaining pandas, questioned the stereotypical label placed on the them. In order to prove the hypothesis that pandas are a source of “attraction,” others must have the perception of giant pandas as a “cute,” attractive animal. Many sources have mentioned that

they heavily relate “laziness” with giant pandas instead of the cuteness factor. Most respondents agreed with me that giant pandas deserve the label of “cute” instead of “lazy.” In the future, to expand opinion, respondents should be allowed to choose multiple options. While survey data revealed that the common term associated with giant pandas is “cute,” it is unknown if the participants think of the animals as lazy.



In order to expand the survey significance, the respondents who answered “lazy,” were compared to those who chose “cute,” to see if their perception of China were different. Out of the respondents that believe that pandas are lazy, 36% answered that it was “extremely unlikely” that they would ever visit China. While again, outside factors may affect this, political tension and distrust may influence these choices as well.

Likelihood of Visiting China	Already Visited China	Extremely Likely	Maybe	Extremely Unlikely	I will never visit China
Number of Respondents who answered “Lazy”	1	2	6	6	1

Overall, the survey was helpful in dissecting the public opinion about giant pandas, and the idea that they are as “attractive” as the hypothesis understands them to be. The data reveals that the power of attraction is relevant to the national image of a giant panda. Since the public places the label of “cute” on the giant panda, China can use them to soften their national image, because they are an attractive, “cute,” unassuming species. Moreover, the connection between giant pandas and China is not overlooked by the American republic, since many people have seen a giant panda at a zoological institution. Giant pandas are associated with China, meaning that they can be a tool in Chinese foreign diplomacy.

IV: Conclusion:

In order to truly appreciate the connection between giant pandas and Chinese policy, one must be able to take the role animals play politically seriously. Throughout history, political leaders have used animals to promote friendship and diplomacy between nations. China was playing a strategic game when they gifted giant pandas to the United States in 1972 to improve relations. Only 7 years later, the United States would choose to formally recognize the People's Republic of China (mainland China today) instead of the democratic Republic of China (modern Taiwan). China used the giant panda because of their lack of presence in Imperial China and before Mao Zedong rose to power in 1949. The giant panda stands for a "new" China that rejects its imperial past.

The panda loan programs with United States and other international zoological institutions are modernized concept of panda "gifts." China has created a thriving business, as institutions (and their national government) are willing to pay large sums of money in order to house giant pandas. While there are some superficial reasons as to why China is taking their giant pandas out of United States intuitions after 2020, such as panda age and higher reproductive success at the Chengdu Panda Base, perhaps not enough time has passed to truly see if there is a direct correlation between giant panda programs and United States-Chinese relations. In the coming years this relationship will become more apparent, as China has not removed giant pandas from Taiwanese Zoos, as they have had very recent breeding success.

As seen through survey data, Americans do believe giant pandas are "cute" animals, and the theory that they have a common perception as a lazy beast with low reproduction possibilities is incorrect. In addition, Americans do associate giant pandas with China, with over 80% relating giant pandas to the nation as a whole. Moreover, the majority of participants had seen a giant

panda in a zoological institution. While giant pandas have a larger presence in the Southern United States as the best institutions reside there (Zoo Atlanta, Memphis Zoo, and the Smithsonian Zoo), pandas have infiltrated the American concept of “take your child to the zoo day.” Since Zoological institutions have a younger audience, this is giving American children a perception of a “softer” China at a younger age. While this will change as they get older, and will develop even more if they choose to study foreign relations. I speak from experience. One part of me still clings to the idea that China is a land of smiling giant pandas and bamboo, despite of what I have learned.

The survey also revealed that while most people do not feel as if they will have the opportunity to visit China in the future, if there was the possibility of holding a giant panda during a visit this could change their minds. This is interesting because over 65% of the respondents answered they could be swayed into visiting China if they could hold a giant panda. This revealed that pandas do have the opportunity to change opinions, enough to change the decision to visit a nation. The survey results revealed that giant pandas are an effective tool for influencing perceptions of China.

In the future, there are a few ways to improve this research. First, a more in-depth survey with more questions, would increase the theory that giant pandas have softened the American perception of China. For example, if people think it is feasible that China could use giant pandas to soften the national image, as well as the public’s thoughts towards Chinese relations. In addition, the contrast of the data between respondents who felt tensions with China were high, to their responses towards giant pandas and their “soft” qualities, would provide insight to whether knowledge of Chinese-foreign relations had an impact on people’s perception of giant pandas.

Giant pandas' matter, because of the Chinese presence globally. China is a power five nation, plays a large role in global economics, and is heavily influencing academia with their Confucius Institutes and language programs. While it appears small minded to claim that “fluffy” “fat” animals plays a role in international relations, the research shows otherwise. The same panda that is the symbol of the World Wildlife Fund, Zoo Atlanta, and the Panda Express in the Union at the University of Mississippi, is the same panda that is used in Communist China national news broadcasts. In order to be successful in American foreign diplomacy with China, there must be knowledge of the tools China is using in order to gain attention and success. Although I have aspirations to become a Veterinarian and I already thought that animals have a large role in the policy of nations, it is undeniable that the giant panda is a tool of Chinese soft power. The giant panda is an effective tool to soften the Chinese national image and desensitizes the American public to China as a whole.

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“为何古代两军打仗，只要一举“弭虞”旗，当时就和平了。” 2021. Sina News Agency.

Appendix A:
Survey from data collection in Chapter 3

1. Are you 18 years of age and older
 - Yes
 - No (if no is clicked survey will end)
2. How would you define your knowledge on Chinese culture on a scale of 1-5? (1 being none, 5 being most knowledgeable)
3. Have you ever celebrated the Chinese Lunar New Year?
 - I have never have celebrated or heard of Chinese Lunar New Year
 - I have heard of but I have never celebrated Chinese Lunar New Year
 - I have celebrated Chinese Lunar new year irregularly over the years
 - I celebrate Chinese Lunar New Year every year
4. Giant pandas are found in China. How “cute” do you find giant pandas on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being unattractive and 5 being most attractive?
5. Have you ever visited a Zoo that has had giant pandas?
 - Yes
 - No
6. Would you be more interested in visiting China if you knew you could hold a giant panda while you were there?
 - I would never visit China
 - I would consider visiting China if holding a panda was possible
 - I would go to China if I could hold a giant panda
 - I want to visit China whether or not I could hold a panda
7. Do you have a desire to learn more about the Chinese zodiac system?
 - Yes
 - No
8. How familiar are you with your Chinese zodiac sign on a scale on 1-5 with one being very unfamiliar and 5 being most familiar
9. Do you associate dragons with Chinese culture?
 - Yes
 - No
10. Which would you most normally associate dragons with?
 - Bravery
 - Strength
 - Beauty
 - Power
11. How likely do you think it is that China chose dragons as a national symbol to symbolize their power as a nation with 5 being certain and 1 being most unlikely
12. What do you commonly associate giant pandas with
 - Zoological institutions
 - China
 - Bamboo
 - Stuffed animals
13. Have you ever visited China?

- Yes
 - no
14. How likely are you to visit China in the future
- I want to visit China and i will do what it takes to go
 - I am interested in visiting china
 - I am indifferent
 - I have no desire to visit china
15. What animal do you most associate with China?
- Snow leopards
 - Dragons
 - Golden nose snub monkeys
 - Giant pandas
16. What category describes you?
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
 - Asian
 - Black or African American
 - Hispanic or Latino
 - Middle Eastern or North African
 - White
 - Other
 - Prefer to not disclose
17. What is your age?
- 18-22
 - 22-30
 - 30-40
 - 50+
18. What is your gender?
- Male
 - Female
 - Prefer to not disclose

