

BACKGROUND GUIDE
U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE: GIANT
PANDA BEAR POLICY

Composed by Lauren Nash



WMIDMUN-XXII

DIRECTOR'S LETTER

Dear Delegates,

I am thrilled to welcome you all to WMIDMUN XXII as a part of the Special Assembly on Giant Panda Lease Policy! My name is Lauren Nash (pronouns: she/her) and I will be your director for the committee. I am a sophomore at William and Mary and am planning to major in government and environmental science. My experience with Model UN includes acting as a chair for the past two WMHSMUN conferences and directing for WMIDMUN last spring.

A little about me: I am from Wilmette, Illinois (to give you an idea of where that is, I live about 30 minutes outside of Chicago in the suburbs). At school I am a member of a few different societies including: Club swim, Kappa Delta sorority, Acropolis magazine, WISE (Women in Stem), and IRC (International Relations Club). I also was an Orientation Aide this past year. And this spring I will begin research with the conservation program at W&M. A few hobbies of mine include reading, baking, hiking, art, and binge watching tv shows with my friends. I also love to host movie nights and take late night walks around CW with my friends.

In this committee we will be taking a look at Panda Diplomacy, which refers to China's practice of sending out pandas to other nations' zoos as a form of diplomacy. While this topic is relevant to a number of different countries that host pandas, our main focus will be on those pandas sent to the United States. Therefore, this committee will be concerned primarily with the current state of affairs between the United States and China. As many of you may have seen on the news, tensions between the two countries have been higher in recent years. However, it is important to refrain from heated discussions and to remember to be respectful while both addressing other delegates and the topic at large throughout the conference. It is your responsibility to diplomatically and politely discuss the policies at hand to determine a solution for the parties involved.

I hope that you all look forward to taking part in WMIDMUN and are ready to take on this challenge, while also having some fun. In addition, I want to emphasize how important it is to follow a culture of respect and kindness both within this committee and at WMIDMUN. On that note, there will be zero tolerance for racism, sexism, or any kind of discrimination. This applies to directives in committee and also to interactions between delegates. I trust you will all play your part in making sure this conference is inclusive and enjoyable for all of your fellow delegates.

Once again, welcome to the Special Assembly on Giant Panda Lease Policy and I look forward to meeting you all!

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Background on the Giant Panda Lease Policy

China has long used Giant Pandas as a form of diplomacy with the tradition going all the way back to 1941. This has been referred to as a use of soft power because China hopes that other nations will associate the cute, cuddly panda with them in a move to improve its image. Over the course of many years, pandas have been gifted to many different countries to signal positive relations. This was modeled when Beijing sent a pair of cubs to Washington as a thank you for helping with the Japanese invasion. However, it was not until 1972 that the pandas started to become a bigger deal.



The Nixon Visit

At this time, President Nixon visited China to increase diplomatic and trade relations between both countries. During the trip, First Lady Pat Nixon visited the Beijing zoo, where she admired the giant pandas. Immediately after, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai promised to deliver some pandas to the United States as a gift. Mrs. Nixon then led the welcome party for the pandas, named Hsing-Hsing and Ling-Ling, at the National Zoo in Washington DC. Both pandas ended up generating many visitors at the zoo up until their deaths in the 1990s, and on the first day alone they brought in 20,000 people.

This was the first time that gifting the pandas became such a monumental event. The panda's arrival had acted as a grand diplomatic gesture, when in previous years they had served as small envoys of friendship. It demonstrated the changing relationship between China and the United States from that of enemies to potentially acting as allies.

Introduction of Loan Policy

The loan policy changed again in 1984, when China began charging high loans instead of gifting the pandas for free. This started out as renting the pandas to foreign zoos for short periods of time, but eventually switched to long-term research loans. These loans would last around a decade and cost \$1 million yearly, with the money raised going towards conservation efforts for the bears.

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Past Issues

The loan arrangements have hit snags in the past, but not to the extent that they are now. In 2010, Daniel Ashe, who headed the federal Fish and Wildlife Service, went to China to fix a technical bureaucratic problem, preventing the renewal of the loan agreement. But in this case, the issue was easily resolved, allowing for the loans to be extended.



The Memphis Zoo and its Mistreatment Allegations

More recently, two pandas named Ya Ya and Le Le were brought to the Memphis Zoo in 2003. They were an instantaneous success and became one of the city's most visited attractions, leading the zoo to renew their loan in 2013. However, since 2019 both zoo visitors and panda supporters had been worried that Ya Ya appeared somewhat thin and discolored. In response, both zoo officials and vets stated that the bear was just small framed and experienced fur loss due to hormones, not due to malnourishment or sickness. Additionally, the zoo has been transparent about the pandas' care on their website. But this did not stop animal advocates from accusing the zoo of mistreatment and forming an advocacy group whose mission was for the pandas to be sent back to China. The Memphis zoo said that they would send the pandas back once the lease expired in 2023, but Le Le died all of a sudden. This prompted advocates to claim that Le Le had shown ailing health on the panda cam up until his death, which the Zoo denied.

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The Chinese Association of Zoological Gardens sent a group of experts to look into the circumstances surrounding Le Le's death. An autopsy conducted by scientists ruled the cause of death to be from heart disease. The experts also found through examining Ya Ya's medical reports that the bear was experiencing hair loss due to a skin disease, but maintained a healthy appetite, regular stools, and a steady weight. Additionally, Xie Zhong, the head of the association, revealed that the panda's skin condition could be traced back to family genes which had worsened with age and seasonal hormonal changes. Still, those in China did not believe this and began to show anger towards the Chinese Association of Zoological Gardens, while also maintaining their frustration with the Memphis Zoo. People began to request that the zoo be prevented from receiving loans and for US pandas to be brought back to China.

This has also led to cries for the end of panda diplomacy. Some argue that China needed the loans while it was still developing as a nation, but now that it is a global superpower, such diplomatic gestures are unnecessary.

Chinese officials, though, have continued to maintain that the pandas had been well cared for the Memphis Zoo and beloved by the American public. Mao Ning, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, has also said that "China is willing to continue to work with other partners, including the US, to contribute to the conservation of endangered species." However, the public still seems to be upset with the United States and may not want the loans to continue any further.

Goodbye Giant Pandas

Currently, China has been pulling many of its pandas from US zoos at their loan expiration dates, without any indication of renewing the loans in the future. The pandas at the Smithsonian's National Zoo have already been transported back to China, making it the first time the zoo has not had pandas in its possession in fifty years.

While the pandas were at the zoo, they provided a great benefit to the public, with many children enjoying the opportunity to see the bears. NPR interviewed a few students on a school field trip at the D.C. zoo, where some students said that they wished the pandas could stay longer, but also understood why it was important for them to go back to China. Now, many might grow up without this kind of appreciation for pandas because of their removal.

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Economic Impacts

Prior to their departure, the number of visitors at the Smithsonian zoo also largely increased as many wanted to see the pandas one last time. A similar situation occurred in the Netherlands and Japan, with large crowds gathering to see the pandas in both countries before their send off. This brings to attention another issue with the pandas' removal: a loss in revenue. For many of these zoos, pandas have proven to be a major attraction for visitors, causing ticket sales to greatly increase in result. This could lead to economic hardship at many of these institutions by decreasing the money they bring in. In result, this might lessen available funding for important conservation and biological research, zoo maintenance, and habitat improvement. Also, China will lose the money made from the loans to fund their own conservation efforts. This may drastically change the scope of conservation efforts for the Giant Panda and other species in the near future.

International Relations

The UK has also returned its remaining pandas and Australia is lined up to lose their last few pandas this year. Unless the loan agreements are extended, there will only be a small number of pandas in western nations. At the same time, though, both Russia and Qatar have received pandas in the past few years. China may be using the pandas to signal to the west that they are unhappy with the current state of affairs, including trade sanctions from the United States. This also might be an attempt on China's part to solidify their alliances with major powers like Russia.



The State of Panda Diplomacy Now

At the moment, Beijing lends 65 pandas to 19 different countries via “cooperative research programs” to improve protections for the bears. Once the pandas get older they then return to China and any cubs born in another country are sent back to China after they are a few years old. However, this arrangement could be diminishing due to worsening relations between China and other nations.

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Political scientists are noticing that the removal of the giant pandas from certain countries is related to growing tensions between China and Western countries. China is now only providing pandas to those countries which it deems as friendly, and removing them from those countries which fail to follow these guidelines. In fact, the removals could be indicative of President Xi Jinping's 'increasingly assertive approach to foreign policy,' says Steve Tsang, the director of the China Institute at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London.

Some say that the lease policy may be ending because the practice is being criticized within China. Others mention that the giant pandas' switch from endangered to vulnerable status on IUCN's list could be why China is reducing its loans. This is because the purpose of the loans was to help the population grow through conservation efforts with foreign zoos. Some countries have also returned their pandas willingly for different reasons. For instance, Canada returned its pandas in 2020 due to a bamboo shortage. There are many possible reasons for the decline in pandas abroad, but diplomacy has likely played a role in many of these decisions.

Still, it is very likely that the decisions are centered around international politics. The United States has done plenty to anger the Chinese government. This includes sanctions on Chinese officials and citizens, blocking the import of Chinese semiconductors, claims that Chinese-made fentanyl is crowding American cities, worries over TikTok being under Chinese ownership, and the balloon fiasco a few months ago. All of these claims show that the US is frustrated with China and may act hostile in the future. Additionally, the Chinese public has been critical of Americans more recently. After Le Le's death, social media platforms like Weibo (kind of like the Chinese version of Twitter) blew up with accusations of mistreatment towards the Memphis zoo. Despite evidence proving the contrary, the public outrage refused to cease. At the same time, videos of the pandas in Russia began to spread all over Weibo because they looked healthier, with many comparing the two countries and praising Russia. Seeing as the United States has proven to be a thorn in the country's side and that the Chinese public is also frustrated with the United States, it makes sense that China might pull out of its loans with the US and other western nations.

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There has been hope, though, that the loan issues might be resolved at a higher level. At a November meeting between President Biden and President Xi Jinping, the idea of renewing the loans was discussed. President Xi Jinping stated that the pandas were “envoys of friendship between the Chinese and American peoples” and that China would be ready to continue to work with the US on panda conservation by sending over more pandas. He also suggested that they would send the next pair to California, most likely to the San Diego zoo. Xi said that he learned many Americans were sad to see the pandas leave and that many Californians were looking forward to their return. This interaction indicates that the lease program could resume in the near future, though it is most likely dependent on the effectiveness of diplomacy between the two leaders. Already Xi has traveled to San Francisco to meet Biden, discussing issues like anti-narcotic initiatives, resuming increased military communications, and having more people-to-people exchanges. Relations could improve if more of these talks take place, possibly leading to a resumption of the panda loans.

Issues to Analyze

1. International diplomacy:

How could ending the lease policy impact US-China relations in the future?

- Ending the lease policy could potentially cause greater tension between the two nations. The lease is a form of diplomacy that has helped bring the two nations much closer together over time. Therefore, losing it could potentially reduce contact between the two nations and negatively impact their perspectives of one another. Especially in 2024, tensions between the two countries are very high with NATO seemingly lining up against China and China aligning with countries like Russia against the United States and its allies. This has led to increased worry within the American public due to China's growing power amid worsening relations.

2. Conservation and societal implications:

What is the societal and/or conservation benefit of leasing the pandas to the US?

- This could increase the amount of research done on the vulnerable giant panda population, benefitting conservation efforts. In addition, Americans will be more likely to care about efforts to protect the giant pandas if they are able to see and learn more about them in person. However, if conservation efforts had not been that effective before when the US originally had pandas (the species is still classified as vulnerable), then what makes it certain that bringing the pandas back will have an impact on conservation efforts? There is also an economic benefit to having pandas in the US as tourists will pay a fair amount to see them at the zoos. It could be worth asking how the US might financially compensate for the removal of pandas. China also benefits from the arrangement because they receive a great deal of money and positive publicity from loaning the pandas.

3. China's global image:

What could China stand to gain or lose from ending the lease?

- China could stand to lose a form of soft power (ability to shape preferences through appeal/attraction) by removing the pandas, which might negatively impact China's image globally.
- All the aforementioned benefits to having pandas in US zoos improve how China is viewed by Americans. In result, this enhances China's reputation around the world because the US has a voice in a lot of global discussions.
- However, this could be seen as a show of power to demonstrate that they are not aligned with the US and are moving towards hostilities or just a less friendly relationship. This especially makes sense given the recent anti-Chinese sentiment within the US from complaints about Chinese Tik Tok ownership to US sanctions on the Chinese officials.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How can economic potential be maximized for both China and its loan partners?

What do all parties involved stand to gain/lose from the panda lease program?

What measures can be taken to ensure that political tensions do not disrupt necessary conservation efforts?

How might the panda lease model be useful for other conservation efforts for different species?

Do new loan agreements need to be drafted? If so, who should draft these agreements and what standards should they follow?



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What can be done to mitigate the spread of misinformation and hostile information that might be harmful to the conservation movement?

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Dossier:

1. **President Biden:** The President of the United States. He has been in talks with President Jinping to see about the renewal of the panda leases with China. Biden would likely welcome a return of the pandas to US zoos and better cooperation between the two nations.
2. **President Xi Jinping:** The President of China. He has been in talks with President Biden regarding the renewal of the panda lease program with the US, but has not been clear as to what his intentions are currently. Earlier, he did say he would like to continue the lease program in the United States, but it is uncertain whether this will happen or not. This could be a leveraging tool that he might use to influence diplomacy.
3. **Xie Feng:** The Chinese ambassador to the US, who has appeared to be somewhat optimistic that the lease policy will resume soon. He has publicly said he will do what he can to bring pandas back to the United States. Therefore, it is likely that he would try to strike a deal that is beneficial for the Chinese economy.
4. **Nicholas Burns:** The US ambassador to China. He remains hopeful but is not optimistic that US-China relations will improve over time. Burns has also said that he hopes the two nations are able to have a relationship where they are able to compete without the chance of a conflict. His goal is to live in peace with China, which would mean bettering relations between the two nations.
5. **Elena Songster:** A Professor at St. Mary's who is an expert in panda diplomacy. Her research looks at the environmental history of modern China. She has also written a book on how pandas have had a central role in politics through their significance to conservation, icon status, economic benefits, and use in foreign affairs.
6. **Raymond B. King:** The President and CEO of the Atlanta Zoo. He would likely favor keeping pandas at his zoo because of the tourist revenue they bring in for conservation efforts and zoo maintenance. This is especially the case that as of now, Atlanta is the only US zoo that still has pandas.
7. **Paul A. Baribault:** The President of San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance. He has said that he is excited about President Xi's continued support of giant panda conservation efforts between both countries and his wish for Californians to have pandas again. Also, he has stated that the team at the zoo is ready to welcome a new generation of pandas to further wildlife conservation and inspire people to support such efforts.
8. **Matt Thompson:** The President of Memphis Zoo. He has said that the zoo hopes to have more pandas in the future, which means that he would support extending the lease policy.
9. **Brandie Smith:** The Director of the Smithsonian's National Zoo. She manages the Zoo's conservation biology research team and was instrumental in updating the giant panda program through breakthroughs in reproductive biology. Smith is also a member of IUCN's Conservation Planning Specialist Group. Her research in population genetics has helped efforts to conserve wild and zoo populations.
10. **Dan Ashe:** The President of Association of Zoos and Aquariums in the US. In 2010, he was the head of the federal Fish and Wildlife Service, where he dealt with an issue preventing the renewal of the National Zoo's lease agreement. He has said that while this problem was easy to solve, the current situation is much different. Ashe thinks this is because there are tensions at a higher level of government that need to be addressed at that level.
11. **Melissa Songer:** A Conservation ecologist at Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute's Conservation Ecology Center. Her focus includes "the conservation and landscape ecology of endangered species in Asia and Chad." She is interested in Giant panda conservation and restoring their habitats in China.

12. **Duan Zhaogang:** The Director of the Chinese Conservation and Research Center for the giant panda. He leads state efforts to conserve the species through efforts like advancements in reproductive technology and releasing artificially bred pandas back into the wild.
13. **Wang Yi:** A Minister of Foreign Affairs of China, Director of the CCP Central Committee Foreign Affairs Commission Office, and former member of the Politburo. He has insisted that the US and China must agree on peaceful coexistence and not focus too much on their differences, similar to when they first began diplomatic relations. Wang then promised giant pandas would come back to the US by this year's end. At the same time, he showed frustration with the use of sanctions and power games, asking the US to understand China's development and core interests.
14. **Rishi Sunak:** He is the Prime Minister of the UK. The Edinburgh zoo has also given back its pandas to China, leaving the UK without any of the bears currently. The UK could also be interested in possibly bringing back pandas for research and economic reasons, so the Prime Minister might look favorably upon a return of the pandas. Additionally, he could act as a third party during US and China negotiations.
15. **Xie Zhong:** The senior engineer and vice-president of the Chinese Association of Zoological Gardens. They would likely favor a solution that is best for the pandas more than anything else, because the pandas are a core interest of the association. This means that outside research on breeding and conservation could be one way to convince them to support panda loans.
16. **Chee Meng Tan:** An associate Professor at Nottingham University Business School that specializes in panda diplomacy. He thinks that Beijing might be signaling to the West that they are unhappy with the current state of foreign affairs by withholding the pandas.
17. **David Field:** The Chief officer of the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland. He has said that housing the pandas has made it easier for the zoo to connect with people and brought attention to their conservation efforts. The breeding program did fail, but he was happy that the pandas had inspired many to care about nature.
18. **Pan Wenshi:** A renowned Panda Biologist, Conservationist, and Professor at Peking University. He is the director of the Giant Panda and Wildlife Conservation Research Center at Peking University. Also, his work revealed that pandas needed their habitats to be protected in order to survive in the wild.
19. **Brian Beall:** The Director of the National Travel and Tourism Office. He could provide some input how the lease program might impact revenue brought in by tourism and foreign travel.
20. **Dr. Hou Rong:** The Vice Director of the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding. The research base is concerned with wildlife research, captive breeding, conservation education, and educational tourism. As someone who has experience in biology and conservation, she could provide a scientific perspective on the importance of conducting research programs when it comes to protecting the vulnerable panda populations.
21. **Caroline Wilson:** The British Ambassador to China. She could be useful during negotiations between the US and China ambassadors by acting as a third party. Additionally, as the UK also was part of the panda lease program, she could provide a useful insight on how that program might have shaped relations between the two countries.
22. **Zheng Zeguang:** The Chinese Ambassador to the UK. He could provide a perspective on how the panda lease program worked in the UK and what this could mean for the program's continuance in other countries. Additionally, he might be able to help with the lease negotiations in the US.
23. **Ginette Hemley:** She is a Senior VP of Wildlife Conservation at WWF, where she manages programs to ensure a sustainable future for the most endangered and iconic species. In the past, she has launched global recovery programs for critically endangered species and worked with different partners to create long-term solutions.

24. **Lonnie Bunch:** The head of the Smithsonian Institute. He has said that the zoo would like the pandas back and that they would like to work with China to help make this happen. Bunch seems to be optimistic and willing to put effort into the program.

25. **Lael Brainard:** The Director of US National Economic Council and former Vice Chair of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve. She could provide a better understanding of how having the pandas at US zoos has had an economic impact by changing revenue levels at both the zoos and the local economy.

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