

Panda diplomacy

Literally soft power?

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on panda diplomacy as a part of Chinese interest in soft power and its public diplomacy. The main purpose is to examine the role of the panda in Chinese foreign affairs. A previous research chapter is mapped out to understand the domestic discussion on soft power and the state of public diplomacy in Chinese foreign affairs. Pandas and the concept of panda diplomacy is then examined from an empirical perspective in different ways they are being used, concluding that pandas and their popularity makes them a unique and powerful source of soft power. Panda diplomacy is further analyzed in three different contexts: Nordic countries, in the US and Japan, and in Taiwan, the conclusion is that countries must both have a good relationship with China and be of economic interest. In the analysis, the previous chapters are analyzed from Gilboa's framework for analyzing public diplomacy. Concluding that the uniqueness and strongly emphasized ties to China makes it an effective measure of drawing attention from other domestic issues, as well as generally being a good way of engaging the public which thereby makes it a useful and utilized tool of public diplomacy.

Key words: Panda diplomacy, China, Soft power, public diplomacy, Chinese foreign affairs

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1 Introduction

The theory of China's rise to the role as the world's leading power is met in many ways. Critics claim that there are several issues standing in the way of that sort of hegemonic change. There is the question of civil liberties, demographic issues, and if the ruling communist party can remain in power with a growing middle class. The instability would make China unable to surpass the United States. On the other hand, others portray it as inevitable. The Chinese economy will eventually grow large enough to combat the United States' economy and with it comes political power. The fear of change and by that a fear of loss of influence is evident with the ever so popular topics about the future role of a rising China. Perceiving this as a threat can cause political measures, attempting to limit economic influence from China. But there are ways of getting around this picture. By increasing its attractiveness, it enables a nation to gain trust, by the ability to get others to want the same outcome as one wants. This is where the panda enters the picture.

1.1 Panda diplomacy

Panda diplomacy is the common name for the act of China sending giant pandas to other countries. Because of the popularity of the animal it usually attracts a lot of attention from both the public and the press. The event where the agreement is signed, or when it is announced that pandas will be sent to another nation, is often very ceremonial and on a high official level. It is not uncommon for states of head or top diplomats to be present during the ceremony. At the same time, not all countries can receive a panda, and the countries which do (at the time of writing there are only pandas in 14 countries) are a small and very specifically chosen group which adds to the question of what the purpose of panda diplomacy actually is.

1.2 Aim

The aim of this bachelor's thesis is to do a case study of the panda used as a tool of soft power and public diplomacy. The topic is commonly found in popular science or is described by journalists, but within academia there have been very few researchers that has written about the subject. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to cover a topic that is both relevant and interesting for the public and create a cumulative thesis, as is described by Teorell and Svensson (2012, p. 18-19). With Chinese influence and economic power in the international system rising, more knowledge about its role as a global player is vital. According to Joseph Nye's theory on soft power, which will be explained further in the next chapter, having it would be more important for China than ever. The way that pandas are being used as a possible diplomatic tool brings to the question if it can be understood from a public diplomacy perspective, this since public diplomacy in many ways can be considered creating soft power, and if so what kind of public diplomacy it would be. Therefore, the research question for this thesis is:

What is the role of pandas in Chinese foreign affairs?

With the additional questions:

Can this role be understood from a public diplomacy perspective?

Is there a strategy behind the choice of panda-receiving countries?

1.3 Methodology

This study is conducted as a qualitative case study, examining the phenomenon called 'panda diplomacy'. Using the concept of soft power as defined by Nye, and Gilboa's Public Diplomacy Framework, combined it is applied to analyze if panda diplomacy can be understood from a public diplomacy perspective. The theories are further defined in the following chapter: Previous Research and are exemplified in the case of pandas in foreign affairs in the empirical part, which is followed by a closer look on bilateral relations and panda diplomacy. The thesis also aims to go deeper using Yan and Zhou's (2004) datasets to research the relations between

China and The United States, as well as China with Japan, combining it with when pandas were sent to the countries, to see if anything can be read from how the relationship between the countries have changed and if there is any connection to the pandas. The methodology of those graph is further explained in chapter 4. The study also looks at more recent cases, specifically the Nordic countries, as these countries are similar in many other ways. It examines Chinese relations with two countries which pandas have been decided to be given to, in this case Finland and Denmark, and Chinese relations to their neighbors Iceland, Sweden, and Norway, which of the time the thesis is published have not yet signed any agreement to receive pandas. The difference between these otherwise similar countries is analyzed as an example to see how the choice of countries that receives pandas can be understood. Unfortunately, Yan and Zhou did not do any data sets on Sino-Nordic relations as this would have made the connection between it and panda diplomacy clearer. The reason for including these cases anyway is that most countries which have received pandas are smaller than The US and Japan, so to be able to understand new examples of panda diplomacy in the future it made more sense to look at other cases than just the two of them.

1.4 Material

This thesis is a qualitative study and of the theory-consuming kind. Empirical material is used as the object of analysis, combined with second hand sources and previous research to answer the research questions. Because of the nature of the topic, official documents regarding panda diplomacy and a possible strategy is not something that the author could gain access to. When reaching out to zoos they did not get back or did not answer the asked question. The material will therefore be mainly based on second hand sources. Mainly using news articles, or official documents from the state visits. Many academic sources are used as well which poses a problem as there can be agendas from the authors, not uncommon especially with a topic regarding China. As there is a discussion of whether China even has any soft power this is briefly touched upon, but the main focus is the discussion from the Chinese perspective to help understand how pandas can fit in to the debate there. Because of the time limit of writing a thesis on this level much of the Chinese

academic sources are unfortunately second hand but as Riva (2016) has written a very comprehensible and thorough work about the Chinese soft power discussion, the author still believes that they were able to take part of it. Another issue is biases which can come from both the Chinese side which might lean to the positive, while a more western perspective, because for example the perceived threat of a rising China, which could make them warier of Chinese influence. Nonetheless both perspectives are strived to be included and is something the author takes in to account.

2 Previous research

2.1 Soft power

The term Soft power was coined by Joseph Nye (1990 [2004]) in his book “Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics”, discussing means of influence and power that the United States have. The definition of soft power is the power of attraction and persuasion. Comparing it with hard power, which is coercion through military or economic means, soft power is similar to the second face of power, where nations can get other nations to follow them, because they simply want to. (2004, page 5) Instead of making people act through coercion it causes them to cooperate. Therefore, soft power has the ability to change what others desire. Nye (2004 page 11-15) further defines culture, political values, and the country’s foreign policy as sources of soft power, but it is not limited to these. The hard power sources can also be used in increasing the countries attraction and add to the soft power, if they are not used in a coercing or bribing manner – as that would be hard power. However, soft power should unarguably not be regarded as a replacement for hard power. In the case of a nation like China, the presence of military forces in Xinjiang and the bases in the South China Sea are typical means of hard power and are used as such. Nor should the power that comes with economic strength be doubted. Being the second biggest economy and the worlds biggest nation (Guardian 2014) the leverage which comes with that is difficult to argue against.

2.2 China as a wielder of soft power

There is a divide in the debate regarding Chinese soft power, where some claim they have it and other researchers argue that they do not. As Tay (2006) noted there is no such thing as a “Chinese dream” that the people of Asia strive to achieve. Tay

bases this view on the definition that Nye has of soft power being about culture, ideas and the attraction of values, which he claims is something China does not have. As another scholar Weissmann (2012) points out, that while there is an interest for Chinese culture it is questionable if this interest would be as significant would it not be for the country's economic progress.

However, there are those who argue against this. Chua (2012 page 66-67) argues that following the increased importance of soft power as a source of increased trade revenues in East Asia, has led to China pursuing the same path. Where he describes the importance of soft power for Japan and China as “another arsenal for desired leadership in regional and global affairs.” Joseph Nye himself has also in more recent year talked about Chinese soft power (2005, 2017 etc.)

2.3 The Chinese soft power debate

Within the Chinese debate there has been a rising interest in soft power since the Hu Jintao era. The concept of soft power was according to Riva (2016) defined within his rule and translated into *ruan shili* 软实力 and later conceptualized to *wenhua ruan shili* 文化软实力 (cultural soft power). The interest in soft power has in many ways been much higher in China than in the west (ibid). This interest can be explained (Glaser – Murphy, 2009) by the timing of when the theory reached China, as there simultaneously was a big interest in the rise and fall of great powers. Among intellectuals and the party leaders there was a notion that great nations need to have both soft and hard power in order to achieve this status. The fall of the Soviet Union was seen as the worrisome example and the reason for it was understood as the result of failing to have soft power.

From the official party side the phrase “Enhance [Chinese] cultural soft power”, was first used by Hu Jintao in a speech in 2007 (Riva, 2016) and has since come to symbolize the Chinese state's view on it. Furthermore, in a leader in the web version of the communist party's People Newspaper, Renmin Wang (2015) the use of Chinese soft power is said to be a significant strategic task for the nation and communist party. Therefore, it is fair to conclude that the Chinese communist party at least claims to have soft power in mind.

Within the current Chinese debate the dominating view of soft power is the “Shanghai school” or “Cultural school” which argues, like the name suggest, that culture is the main source of soft power. Implying that Chinese culture (not to be confused with the cultural sector) should be promoted abroad to improve the attractiveness of the country (Yu, 2009), rather than the other sources that Nye discussed such as having attractive values and policy. The current definition of Chinese soft power from the governmental side can be attributed to an evolvement of the concept in the Xi Jinping era. In a speech in 2014 Xi attributed that cultural soft power has core-values which should be based on Chinese traditional culture (Riva, 2016 page. 167).

2.4 Chinese public diplomacy

Public diplomacy can be defined as means of increasing a country’s soft power. Targeting and channeled through civil society rather than the traditional government to government way (Zartman, 2009 p 37). It includes activities to create familiarity and knowledge about a country and thereafter increasing the appreciation and creating a favorable image of it.

In the context of China, Wang (2008, p. 263) names an academic seminar on Chinese public diplomacy in the early 2000’s as the turning point in the public diplomacy strategy. Naming changing the international view of China, and making the world accept the rise of Chinese power, as core parts of its aim. Wang (ibid.) further points out the advantages and disadvantages that China faces. Having rapid economic development, which attracts interest, a massive population, which enables huge amounts of people being sent out as Chinese teachers, and personal in for example peace keeping forces, and finally a strong government with great resources are pointed out as advantages. However, the Chinese diplomatic system is decentralized with many different departments and agencies focusing on different areas of interest. Diplomats are said to lack creativity being cautious and reactive rather than proactive and engaging. At the same time the way of how Chinese domestic issues are being portrayed by Western media is also pointed out as another disadvantage.

D’Hooghe (2011) further argues that China’s sources of soft power such as culture and economic progress offers many possibilities for public diplomacy. But the lack of transparency and that civil society still have a very limited role in Chinese public diplomacy are big obstacles for it to be successful in the West. This combined with that Chinese officials often create the Chinese viewpoint internationally rather than members of civil society, and simply providing information by increasing budgets for media outreach, instead of engaging, will not improve their image in the West.

2.5 Theorizing public diplomacy

To theorize the concept of public diplomacy and enable research of this kind Gilboa (2008) created a framework of analyzing public diplomacy. Distinguishing between three ranges of time and different means and purposes. Immediate, includes cyber diplomacy, broadcasting and advocacy, and is more reactive. The intermediate level is more strategic and involves NGOs in strategic communication, and comes through diaspora and company public relations. The Long term one is closer to what is known as traditional public diplomacy with the purpose of creating long-term relationships. Taking years to build up trust and favorable views of the country. It is done through exchanges, cultural diplomacy and branding. With the aim of creating supporting attitudes in the targeted country.

A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS			
Range	Immediate	Intermediate	Long
Time	Hours/days	Weeks/months	Years
Purpose	Reactive	Proactive	Relationship
Media/public opinion	News management	Strategic communication	Building favorable conditions
Government	Closely linked	Partially linked	Remotely linked
Public diplomacy (PD) instrument	Advocacy; international broadcasting; cyber PD	International public relations; corporate diplomacy; Diaspora PD	Cultural diplomacy; exchanges; branding

Graph 1. Gilboa (2008) p. 73

3 Panda diplomacy

The practice of using pandas as a gift to other nations is perhaps most famously done in 1972. Specifically, with the historic meeting between Richard Nixon and Mao Zedong. At the time of the meeting both pandas and American musk ox were exchanged to symbolize the strengthened ties between the nations. Pandas have since then been given as gifts to countries when different states of heads came to visit China, but this practice was later condemned from international NGOs and environmentalist disagreeing with the handling of an endangered animal. Since then the pandas are now being loaned to other nations. All pandas, even if they are born abroad belongs to the Chinese state. The receiving country must pay an annual fee to the Chinese state for keeping them and some zoos even report big loses because of the expensive upkeep (The globe and mail, 2014). However, the panda giving can arguably still be regarded as a diplomatic tool as not any nation is entrusted with a panda. According to Lin (2009) the agreement that another country will receive pandas are commonly announced during formal meetings such as state visits. The high annual fee of keeping and renting a panda further makes panda diplomacy mostly applicable to developed countries. This is the probable reason why pandas are only found in Western and some Asian countries' zoos (Xing, 2010) which is the reason why only this area of the world will be discussed.

3.1 The third stage

In modern times the act of giving another nation a panda has been practiced since the 1950s. It was first conducted mainly towards other communist countries to strengthen relations as allies. Later when China replaced Taiwan as the holder of the Chinese chair in the United Nations, pandas were also sent to western nations as part of state visits. Most famously is as mentioned the pandas that Nixon received after his meeting with Mao Zedong. This period is seen as the first stage as the pandas given during this time were free gifts (Hartig, 2013).

During the 1980s, panda diplomacy turned into a rent-a-panda program (Hartig, 2013). The rarity of pandas made them become a lucrative source of income. They were often rented out for shorter periods of time and would tour around to different zoos and cities. Reasons for the change of this system is attributed to angered environmental and animal rights organizations condemning the way that a then endangered animal was being treated, and so the terms had to change. Since the 90s the conservation of the then endangered animal was made a center part of the panda leasing agreements. For example, pandas sent abroad always had to come in pair for the sake of the pandas. Fees for keeping the pandas remained but was promised to finance the conservation and care of pandas in China. This period since the mid-90s is defined by Hartig (2013) as the third and current stage of panda diplomacy. Buckingham, Neil, David & Jepson (2013) defines the two previous stages in a similar way but instead mentions 2008 as the beginning of the third phase of panda diplomacy. During 2008 an earthquake hit a heavily panda populated area leading to massive damage on conservatories and causing the need to relocate some of the pandas. Therefore, many panda-loans that would expire around this time were extended and another result was that new nations that were already negotiating trade deals were offered pandas as well.

3.2 Symbolism

The pandas are seen as a symbol of co-operation between China and the receiving country. Expressing China's good will (Lin 2009). They are also a tool for increased scientifically and technological co-operation. However, the keeping of the pandas are not the only thing negotiated. Buckingham, et al. (2013) concluded that pandas are representing a seal of approval, if a government agrees to take care of the pandas it shows a long-term commitment to the relationship between the countries. Attributing this to the concept of *Guanxi*, 关系 the importance of keeping a good relationship, where gift giving plays an important part. It is once the relationship and partnership between China and the nation is consolidated that the country can be considered to receive a panda (Gentz in Hartig, 2013)

3.3 The panda as a source of soft power

The notion of having the panda representing China gives the country a softer image. Pandas are regarded cute and is an extremely popular animal. Most people already connect it with China as the worlds entire panda population comes from there (Xing, 2010). The image of a panda representing China can be compared with the dragon, traditionally also a symbol of China. It is very common to find the dragon still being used as a metaphor for a rising and threatening China. Such as in articles describing the rise as a threat to western society metaphorically characterizing China as a threatening dragon that attacks or similar (Yao, 2007). While the panda can also be used in such a manner symbolizing the threating China, the panda itself is not very threatening and therefore does not cause the same notion of worry. Headlines of a panda attacking would not provide the same threatening image.

Using the actual pandas and not just the symbol, there are many ways that pandas can be seen as a source of soft power. The connection between pandas and China is therefore important to maintain. Giving the pandas Chinese names, having the zoos create a Chinese influenced section where the pandas are, is therefore vital (Hartig, 2013). As people who sees the pandas in the zoo will also connect it with China, much more than other animals even though they might also be from a very specific part of the world, they are not connected with that part in the same way.

Panda diplomacy by itself attract a lot of attention from both local and international press. A reason for this can be understood as it derives attention from the formal way of the contract of panda leasing. It being signed by highly ranked officials or by the actual head of state. On the contrary, it is not something that China wants to hide but rather want the rest of world to know. The pandas' cuteness is also a source of extended media coverage turning the focus on them making the discussion about China as merely their country of origin (Hartig, 2013)

Continuing even after the pandas have been given, it is easy to get access to pandas abroad even without visiting a zoo. There are many phonemes such as so called panda cameras where they can be watched through their day. This is present even on the websites of many foreign zoos such as in the Smithsonian national zoo, Edinburgh zoo, and the San Diego zoo. Most notably there is a panda broadcast from the Sichuan panda research base live streaming pandas since 2013 (CNN,

2013). That there are other animals that attract such attention even from state owned media is attention that few other animal species receives.

Pandas are therefore a unique and a powerful source of soft power. Combining its very distinctive traits with their connection to China, and with the popularity and international attention that they gather, it can help increase the appeal of China as the image of the panda will be tightly associated with it.

3.4 Pandas and bilateral agreements

There seems to be a connection between panda diplomacy and bilateral agreements between China and the receiving country (Buckingham et al. 2013). By asking why pandas suddenly were sent to a Scottish zoo, there seemed to be a link between a newly formed trade agreement between Scotland and China (ibid.). The trade agreement also coincided with the loss of the traded resource as the relation between the former trading partner Norway, had deteriorated since the visit from the Dalai Lama and decision to name a Chinese dissident the Nobel laureate of peace in early 2010. That Scotland would receive pandas is understood from these circumstances (ibid).

3.4.1 Language and culture agreements

Another type of agreement that goes beyond trade are ones connected to language and cultural exchange. At the time as the now famous panda Bei Bei was ceremonially given a name, the “One million strong” project was also announced. The project is a bilateral effort attempting to fivefold the number of K-12 students learning Chinese in the United States by bringing it up to 1 million learners by 2020. According to its website (US-China Strong) it is run by a nonprofit organization that works closely with Chinese government officials. More than 30 000 scholarships have also been funded by the Chinese government. From the US side, there is no funding from the state.

In other cases, the presence of the debated Confucius academies seems to be connected to countries which hosts pandas. As described by Paradise (2009) just like the Goethe institute of Germany, China has their own language and cultural

institute called the Confucius Institutes. Commonly university or high school affiliated, it teaches Chinese and Chinese culture, arranges cultural festivals, and host Chinese proficiency tests. The employees are employed by the Chinese state which also pays for their wages, provide material, and funding for the institute. There is also an opportunity to apply for scholarships for exchange to China. Although some of the original Confucius institutes have been cancelled, such as some in the United States and in Sweden, where all the University affiliated ones have been withdrawn, globally most of them remain and the number is increasing. In all countries, which has received pandas these institutes are present (Giant panda global, n.d.)(Hanban, n.d.)

3.4.2 Trade

The connection between trade agreements and panda diplomacy is discussed by Buckingham et al. (2013). Pointing out that since 2008 there seems to be a connection between trade deals and receiving pandas. All of China's mayor trading partners (except India) has received pandas, and there seems to be a connection between uranium exporters, such as Canada, France, and Australia which all have received pandas after 2008. Later initiated panda loans seem to follow the same trend with trade agreements and co-operation in scientific fields being the common connection. The trade agreements do not always have a direct connection and are from time to time signed later than the panda-rental agreement, but countries which received pandas seem to be more likely to score one (ibid.)

3.5 Summary

In conclusion, the panda has as shown in this chapter a unique role in foreign affairs. The Pandas can be an effective source of soft power, drawing a lot of public attention, and especially since the connection that the pandas have to China is emphasized, making the connection between China and the pandas apparent for the public. However, pandas are far from used in all nations to create soft power as only a few selected nations can receive them. This seem to coincide with nations that

China has an economic interest in, as there is a connection between bilateral agreements and panda-receiving countries.

4 Bilateral relations

Since panda diplomacy has manifested itself in different ways since it first started in the 1950s, there is an identifiable difference in the size and nature of the countries that pandas are being sent to. This chapter is divided into three sections looking at the effect of Chinese relationship in three different types of countries of interest, attempting to explain potential strategies behind the choice of the countries. The first is about Nordic countries, symbolizing smaller European countries which are still relevant enough to receive a panda. The next section is about China's biggest trading partners, Japan and The United States, which both has received several pandas throughout the years and in that way, differ from most countries, which usually has only received a pair of pandas once. The third section is about Taiwan which can be seen as an outlier from normal panda diplomacy. However, the usage of pandas is in this case very political and could therefore be understood as a third version of how pandas can be used in public diplomacy.

4.1 Sino-Nordic relations

In recent times, it was announced that two out of the five Nordic countries would receive a pair of pandas. In Denmark, it was announced in 2016 and in Finland it was announced in 2017. Comparing the two countries to its two similar neighbors, Sweden and Norway, they are seemingly somewhat similar in most other aspects. However, as was discussed in the bilateral agreement chapter, Norwegian relations with China had reached an all-time low. While they have improved after negotiations and recent state visits, it is only in recent years that China has announced that the relations are normalized. As for Sweden, there has been no such recent incident before the pandas in Finland was announced. However, if the presence of Confucius institutes is taken in to account all the university affiliated ones have been terminated. This follows a debate of the ethics of having such an institute present in schools and universities, and can definitely be regarded as a

backlash in the bilateral relations between China and Sweden. This is especially a backlash compared to the other Nordic countries where these institutes, at the time of writing, are still present (Hanban, n.d.). There was also a recent case where the Swedish foreign ministry published a report on the condition of human rights in the world where China was criticized for its lack of it. This was later condemned by the Chinese ministry of foreign affairs angered by it (Duowei Xinwen, 2017). Comparing this to Denmark and Finland where there are no political disputes present, maintaining a good relationship between the countries seems to be an important factor. Iceland which also should be mentioned as it is another Nordic country, differs a lot in size and therefore has different conditions than the other Nordic countries. Despite this they were the first country in Europe to sign a free trade agreement with China (Bloomberg, 2015), so while the relationship is better there compared to with Norway and Sweden, the size of Iceland and possibly other aspects such as climate condition is probably preventing them from receiving any pandas.

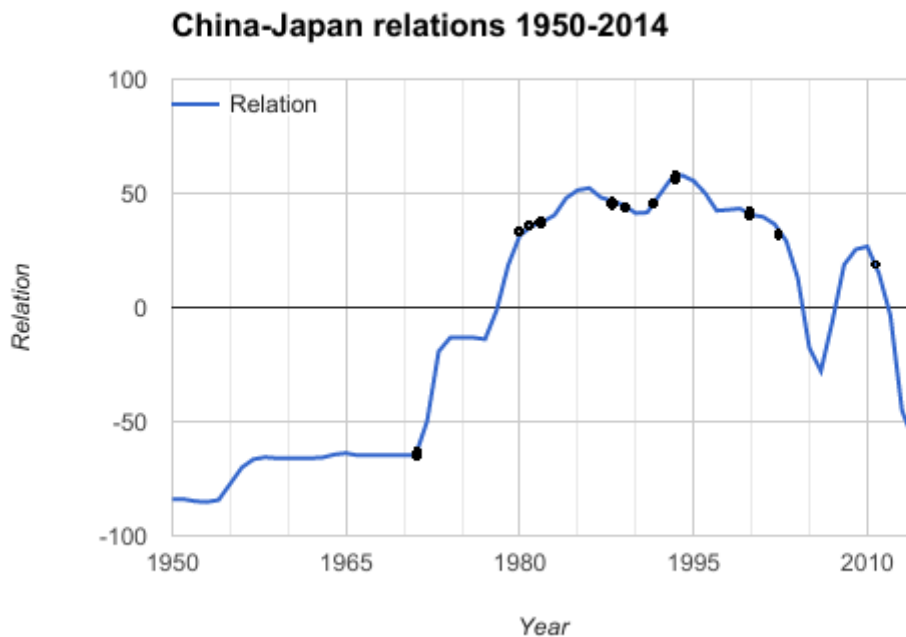
The possible connection between panda diplomacy and trade agreements would mean that there must be an economical advantage in trade between the chosen countries and why they specifically were chosen. At the official event in Finland, attended by Xi Jinping as a part of his state visit, and the Finnish president Sauli Niistö, several co-operation agreements between Finnish and Chinese companies and institutions were announced (Statsrådet, 2017). Prior to this there had been an increase in Chinese investments, a big Finnish IT-company had been acquired, and one of China's biggest bioenergy companies had established in Finland in 2016 (DI, 2017). However, the news about pandas coming to Finland later during 2017 gathered a lot of the attention from the media.

In the case of Denmark, the panda-agreement was signed by the Danish Queen during a state visit to China. The news of pandas arriving was announced in 2016. Since then a huge investment in the Copenhagen zoo has been made, making it a great architectural project to create an attractive space where the pandas will be hosted from 2018 (Zoo, 2017). At the same time an agreement from the latest visit between the Danish prime minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen and Xi Jinping in 2017 presented a new strategic partnership deal proclaiming that the relations between the countries had reach an all-time high (China-Denmark Joint Work Programme, 2017), at the same time as promoting further bilateral co-operation in other fields.

The agreement was in this sense similar very similar of what was negotiated in Finland, as well as the good relationship between the countries which was greatly emphasized in both cases.

4.2 Japan and the United States

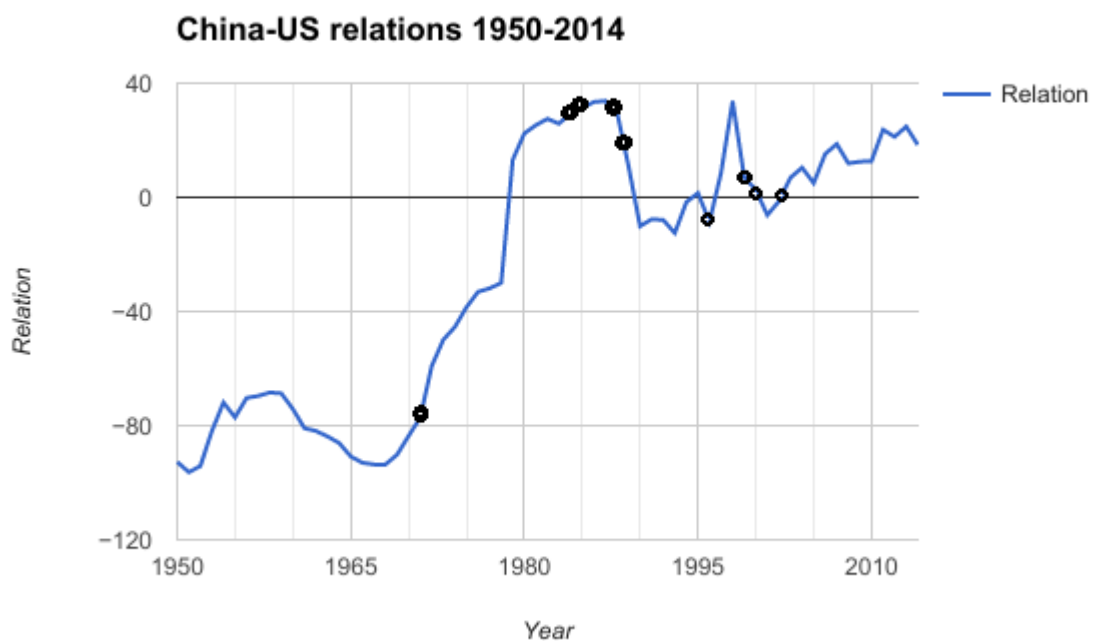
In most countries with pandas there has only been one instance of panda diplomacy. While in some of them the contract of leasing the panda has been prolonged, such as in Germany which received a pair of pandas already in the 1970s, but in most cases, there have not been more pandas sent. The two biggest exceptions to this is Japan and The United States which also have the most pandas outside of China. Furthermore, they are also China's biggest trading partners. The following two graphs show the relationship between China and either Japan or the US combined with black dots, representing the year when panda diplomacy took place, that is when pandas arrived and were received by Japan respectively The United States. The source of the year is based on data from the individual zoos having pandas and Giant panda global (n.d.). As it poses some difficulties knowing exactly when negotiations started or when it was agreed on, it is the reason why the year when the pandas arrive is chosen as what is marked in the graph. The curves symbolize the relationship and are calculated by a score system where both hard and soft power measures from either government influences the rating. Originally the dataset measures the difference between each month in the time span but in this graph, they have been counted as a mean of each year. A trough indicates that relation is bad and a higher score indicates that the relationship is good. The data of the relationship is based on research by Yan and Zhou (2004), the dataset was retrieved from the Tsinghua University (2012) website. Basically, any event that in some way effect the relationship between China and the other country influences and creates a change in the relationship-curve. For example, the rising trend from the 70s in graph 3 is a result of the meeting between Nixon and Mao, which opened for trade and exchange between the countries. Panda diplomacy is not counted in the original data per se but for example state visits and signing trade agreements are, which often results in that the curve increases after pandas have been sent there.



Graph 2

Looking at Graph 2 the time of panda diplomacy in the 1970s can be explained as discussed in chapter 3 by taking place during a time when any country which made a state visit to China would receive a panda. With Japan doing so after switching to recognize China instead of Taiwan as the China in the United Nations, they also received a panda, just a year after Nixon's visit (Lin, 2009). As can be seen in Graph 2, Japan later received pandas during the 80s. This was the second period within panda diplomacy when many countries could rent them and they were rather a source of income for China. Since the 90s, and entrance of the third phase of panda diplomacy per Hartig's definition, Japan received several of them. With the decreased relationship around 2005 there were no pandas given and there was a gap before another one was sent, the request for new ones followed as the last panda in a zoo in Tokyo past away in 2008 (Tokyo Zoo net, 2008) and in 2011 two new ones were sent. There are also two more cities in Japan which has pandas, Kobe and Wakayama. While they are not among the biggest cities in Japan, it could be relevant due to Buckingham et al.'s theory that both are important ports for trade and close to Osaka. the economic center in the region. Pandas have been given for different reasons throughout the period from the 1970s, as can be seen in the graph pandas are only given to Japan when the relationship is on a positive level. Even if

taking in to account that there might take a year or a few from negotiating that pandas will be sent until they arrive, they still seem to have been negotiated when relations were good. The potential outlier would in that case be the pandas that were sent in 2011, following a period of a deteriorated relationship, but this would match Buckingham et al.'s theory that after the earthquake in Sichuan China was more prone to prolong and send out more pandas. While there have been attempts towards trade agreements between China and Japan they have not agreed on a free trade one. During the state visit in which the panda agreement was signed there was also negotiations to facilitate financial investments to encourage cooperation between the two countries (China, 2011).



Graph 3

Panda diplomacy in the United States, as can be read from Graph 3, follows the trend in Japan, with many pandas being sent there during the late 1980s. The later panda diplomacy is much like the in the case of Japan not when the relationship exactly peaked but it was overall on relatively good terms. This seems to match even better taking in to account that the occurring gap between when the agreement was negotiated and signed, from when the pandas arrive could span for a year or so. Making this negotiation more in line with when the relationship was better, as in the case of the pandas arriving in 1996 or in 2000. Since 2003 and forward there

are four cities in the US that have pandas in zoos. During this time, there has been more pandas born and later sent back to China. Despite not being pandas sent from China the newborn cubs can still be considered part of the panda diplomacy. As in the case of a new born panda which was given its name during a Chinese state visit. This was conducted in a ceremonial manner by the first ladies Michelle Obama and Peng Liyuan. The two of them emphasizing the importance of bringing the two countries closer (Time, 2015). The relationship at this point was also positive. Adding to the notion that the relationship should be good between the two countries. However, the connection between a good relationship and pandas does not seem to be as strong as in the case of the Nordic countries. A pair of pandas were even given to the US during the trough in 1996. During the agreement in 2015 the 1000 strong project, which was further discussed in chapter 3, was announced. While not being a trade agreement it did aspire to increase cooperation and exchange between the two countries.

4.3 Taiwan

In the case of Taiwan, the practice of panda diplomacy could be regarded as an outlier. Since China does not recognize Taiwan's proclaimed position as an independent nation, this with the background in the one China policy, where the countries agreed that there is only one China (but they refrain from settling which one it is). So, from the official perspective pandas sent to Taiwan could be interpreted as merely a relocation domestically. However, as Xing (2010) argues that the aim of giving Taiwan two pandas in 2005 was to send them as a gesture of good will and to change the negative opinion that the Taiwanese held towards China because of the increased tensions during that time. But, the pandas and the intent behind them were met by suspicion and they were not accepted. After several meetings between different organizations, diplomats, and zoologists among many, China continuedly tried to make Taiwan accept them. Xing (2010, p. 53) argues further about the uniqueness of this case that "the most drastic change of [...] panda diplomacy was the broader participation of the Chinese public." In an internet event people could send in name suggestions to name the pandas set for Taiwan, and an estimate is that over 1.3 million Chinese people participated in naming the pandas.

The names were Tuan Tuan and Yuan Yuan which combined (*tuanyuan* 团圆) translates to “reunion”. The sitting president whose party held a pro-Taiwan independency line realized the political implications and refused to accept them. After three years when the more pro-China president Ma was elected in to office in 2008, the pandas were accepted and then finally sent to Taiwan. (Lin, 2009).

5 Analysis

First, it is important to recognize that panda diplomacy could in some ways be regarded as a source of hard power instead of soft power, which is the opposite of the premise of this thesis. While sending a panda to another consenting country clearly does not have any military implication, it could potentially be regarded as a bribe, and if so would be part of economic power per Nye's definition as discussed in the Previous Research chapter. The panda-receiving zoo usually increases its visitors as well as supposedly tourism in the regions/country increases. However, the author would argue against this perspective as a hard power since the huge cost for both maintaining the care of the pandas, and fees paid to the Chinese state covering the rental cost typically outweighs the income earned from them even in the most popular zoos. So, arguably the economic burden the caretaking of pandas require, argues against that it should be seen as just a generous gift. The exception being in Taiwan where the pandas also carried a more political message, and is a case where panda diplomacy initially can be regarded as a failure as the pandas did not manage to increase the opinion of China as it was expected to.

5.1 The choice of countries

The choice of panda-receiving countries can in the case of the Nordic countries be clearly seen that the chosen ones were countries which China both has an economic interest in, and has good relations with. In terms of economic interest all countries are similar in size (except for Iceland) and has a similar share of trade with China, other potential situations as not having the budget for it or the climate being unsuitable would be highly unprobeable as Sweden and Norway is so similar with their Nordic counterparts. If the pandas would be sent to a country which China wishes to improve ties to, Norway or Sweden would have been the better candidate. Norway being the one Nordic nation with the highest GDP and a big exporter of oil, should be regarded as a trading partner that China could have an interest in

increased trade from. This stronger relationship with the other two nations can be reflected in the presence of Confucius institutes, and that there has not been any recent decrease in the relationship from acts that the Chinese government disapproves of. Therefore, to answer the research question China sends pandas as seen in the case of the Nordic countries, where they wish to strengthen the relationship with but where it already has strong ties to, by making the receiving country commit to a long-term panda-care taking agreement.

In the case of the United States and Japan pandas have been sent many times to both nations. The timing of the panda-renting agreements does seem to coincide with agreements and increased co-operation between the nations but according to Yan's and Zhou's model it is not at its peaks that these agreements are signed. Therefore, the connection does not appear to be as strong as with the Nordic countries. Taking Buckingham et al.'s (2013) theory in to account that it was not until 2008 that they were used connected to trade agreements, it could mean that the relationship was not as important prior to that. Another reason could be that the importance of trade and co-operation between China and its largest trading partners could influence this as it is important to maintain good relations regardless of sways in ties. Pandas could perhaps be seen as a sign of continued good will or as a reminder of the importance of the relationship. However, taking in to account that it takes some time to negotiate and agree on having pandas sent to the receiving country they seem to have been sent when the relationship was on a somewhat high level. But because of the nature of importance of the relationship it is perhaps not as important as when pandas are sent to smaller nations for the first time, as long as the relationship is not at a too low level as in the case of Taiwan it could have the opposite effect. In some cases, the main reason for pandas being sent seems to be to replenish the panda after the old one had passed away. The connection they have with trade agreements and a potential correlation does not seem strong in the case of Japan and The United States. Although there are cases such as in the United States, specifically the 1000 strong project which was announced at the same time as the Chinese state visit and panda name-giving ceremony. While not a trade agreement, its aim was to increase co-operation and exchange between the two nations. Which seems to be a reoccurring message to all countries which has received a pair of pandas.

5.2 Public panda diplomacy

The way that panda diplomacy is being conducted, in a highly ceremonial way, and usually involving states of heads, makes it an obvious measure of Chinese foreign affairs. Further, the event is commonly out in the spotlight, sometimes open for the public, and thereby not a negotiation kept away from them, making it a measure of public diplomacy. Comparing it with Joseph Nye's definition of soft power as discussed in the Previous Research chapter, it is possible to make conclusions about the nature of panda diplomacy. As argued for by the way that pandas are used, except for perhaps the case of Tuan Tuan and Yuan Yuan in Taiwan, it should not be regarded as primarily a hard power as they are not a threat nor a source of economic hard power in the sense that they are not bribes either. However, one can argue that they are not a typical source of soft power, in the sense that Joseph Nye defined it. The sources for such power should be from culture, values or policy. While culture did not specify the cultural sector, in his own examples the movie industry and literature were used specifically while for example animals or symbols were not used. The American values in his case such as ideals of freedom and the American dream was rather sources of attraction in his example. However, from the Chinese debate and the emphasize on the cultural soft power within it, the panda as a soft power measure fits better in to the picture. The notion that traditional Chinese culture should be promoted and that the panda already by that its origin is from an area that is completely located within China gives it the potential for promoting this picture. The fact that the debate and rising interest in soft power in China, as can be seen in speeches by Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping, correlates to the era which Buckingham et al. states that there has been an increase of panda diplomacy to strategically chosen countries fits well into this picture. While it is not the only measure of soft power, pandas could be seen as a compliment to it. They are commonly sent to countries which already maintain a good relationship with China and in that way, are rather a way of maintaining this level rather than converting the uninitiated. This goes in line with theories on public diplomacy as the receiving public should first be made aware of the country and then measures to increasing the appeal of it should be executed. Putting the case of the Taiwanese pandas in to this context they would initially be counted as a failed case of public diplomacy.

Considering that it was already in 2005 that the pandas were going to be sent they are earlier than the pandas sent according to Buckingham et al.'s definition. Perhaps it is because of the reactions that followed, that China afterwards have made sure to send them to countries which they already have a good relationship with. Although it is difficult to know if the reaction would be similar as the relationship between China and Taiwan is complex, learning from the failed case of public diplomacy combined with Chinese public diplomacy commonly being cautious, as discussed in the previous research chapter, could be a way to further explain China's choice to not send them to countries aiming to improve a lukewarm relationship or where it would be met by suspicion but rather ones they already have a good relationship with.

Comparing panda diplomacy with Gilboa's Framework for Analysis it is apparent that it is meant as a long-term measure. Since the 1990s pandas are rented out for a fixed period often ranging from 10-15 years, making it a big commitment for the panda-receiving country. Since the contract is negotiated for some time and is not something that can be agreed on immediately it should also be regarded as a relationship building rather than re- or proactive. However, in terms of how panda diplomacy is used in as it targets public opinion it could arguably be in the field of both strategic communication, and building favorable conditions. Using the notion that pandas are very popular and iconic many zoos provide blogs or "panda-cameras" so that the public can get access to pandas even without physically being present is another way that Chinese public diplomacy manages to reach out and is more modern than the traditional public diplomacy. This system is also found within China and the Chengdu Research Base, which broadcasts its pandas 24/7 making it easy to reach out to audiences. However, while it is the act of sending pandas to other countries which is the focus of this thesis, it is still interesting to note that they are in that way strategically using even the pandas which are still staying in China. Being unable to get the public engaged is something that d'Hooze criticized Chinese public diplomacy for, and pandas could perhaps be a successful way of getting around that problem.

Another difference from the Framework for Analysis is that the Chinese governmental involvement differs as it is closely linked to panda diplomacy, rather than NGOs or Chinese diaspora being involved in the process. This does not come as a surprise as the Chinese government is a big government and because of the

nature of panda diplomacy being similar with traditional public diplomacy, the governments involvement is thereby necessary to give it its effect. At the same time, it is a part of cultural diplomacy or even branding as the pandas are highly connected to the Chinese image and it continues being purposely so as zoos create a Chinese inspired environment to add to the picture of the pandas being a Chinese symbol. Therefore, comparing panda diplomacy with the Public Diplomacy Framework it almost matches the long-term type of public diplomacy completely. The way that pandas are used in a more strategic way than perhaps is usual and that the Chinese government is highly involved makes it different, and so the practice of panda diplomacy goes outside of the framework. However, it is still evident that the pandas are used as a long-term strategic measure with the aim to increase the attraction level of China in the eyes of the public in the panda-receiving nation.

Finally, it is unlikely that a visit to a zoo hosting pandas or watching them on a live stream, would make someone go out of their way to make their government support China-friendly policies. However, pandas do attract a lot of attention and engagement from the public. So, could pandas be a way of drawing attention from other China-related issues? Perhaps learning from the case of Taiwan, where the attempts of panda diplomacy instead increased the suspicion and made both the public and its officials concerned about it. In many of the cases of third stage panda diplomacy it tends to draw the attention to the cuteness of pandas rather than leaving space for a discussion about its actual intentions. As previously discussed about general Chinese public diplomacy is that one disadvantage it has is Chinese domestic affairs. As Joseph Nye discussed is ideals and policy an important source of soft power and in the case of China this would therefore be to their disadvantage. While soft power is not understood as a zero-sum game an increased cultural soft power effect while decreasing the negative publicity about domestic affairs, and by that making foreign media and the public hear less about domestic issues in China, and instead focusing on the news of pandas coming to their country could be a way that China tries to increase its overall appeal and by that increasing its soft power.

6 Concluding remarks

This thesis has been an attempt to research the role of panda diplomacy as a part of Chinese public diplomacy. The subject brought out extra interest from the author especially since the concept of panda diplomacy has been of big interest among the public and in the media, especially in the light of a panda arriving to their country, but at the same time very little has been written about the subject academically. The findings of this thesis are that the panda with their uniqueness and strong ties to China, which through successfully engaging the public continuously manage to connect the animal to the country, are both a useful and utilized tool in public diplomacy and a source of soft power. As could be seen it is not a typical way of conducting public diplomacy but it is apparent that it is meant to strengthen the relationship between China and the receiving country making a long-term commitment between the nations. The countries chosen as could be seen in the example of the Nordic countries appears to be of economic interest to China, but must also already have a good relationship and strong ties with them. Trade agreements are still negotiated without having a panda sent and a potential explanation could in the case of too small economies be the lack of resources to be able to commit to taking care of a panda for the required period. Panda diplomacy seems to be an effective public diplomacy measure as the attention that pandas get in the media provides a good picture of China, especially if it potentially leaves less room for a critical view of it. What effect the actual pandas staying in the zoo has would be a subject for further research. If the population of countries such as Finland and Denmark in the future will regard China in a more positive way than its neighbors would do, is an interesting subject to continue with. If that is the actual effect that China wishes to accomplish is not something that can be concluded from this thesis, but its findings indicate that because of the ceremonial and highly official way that panda diplomacy is conducted, panda diplomacy already manages to create the image of a nation emphasizing the strong bond and giving its deep trust and commitment to long term cooperation with the panda-receiving nation.

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