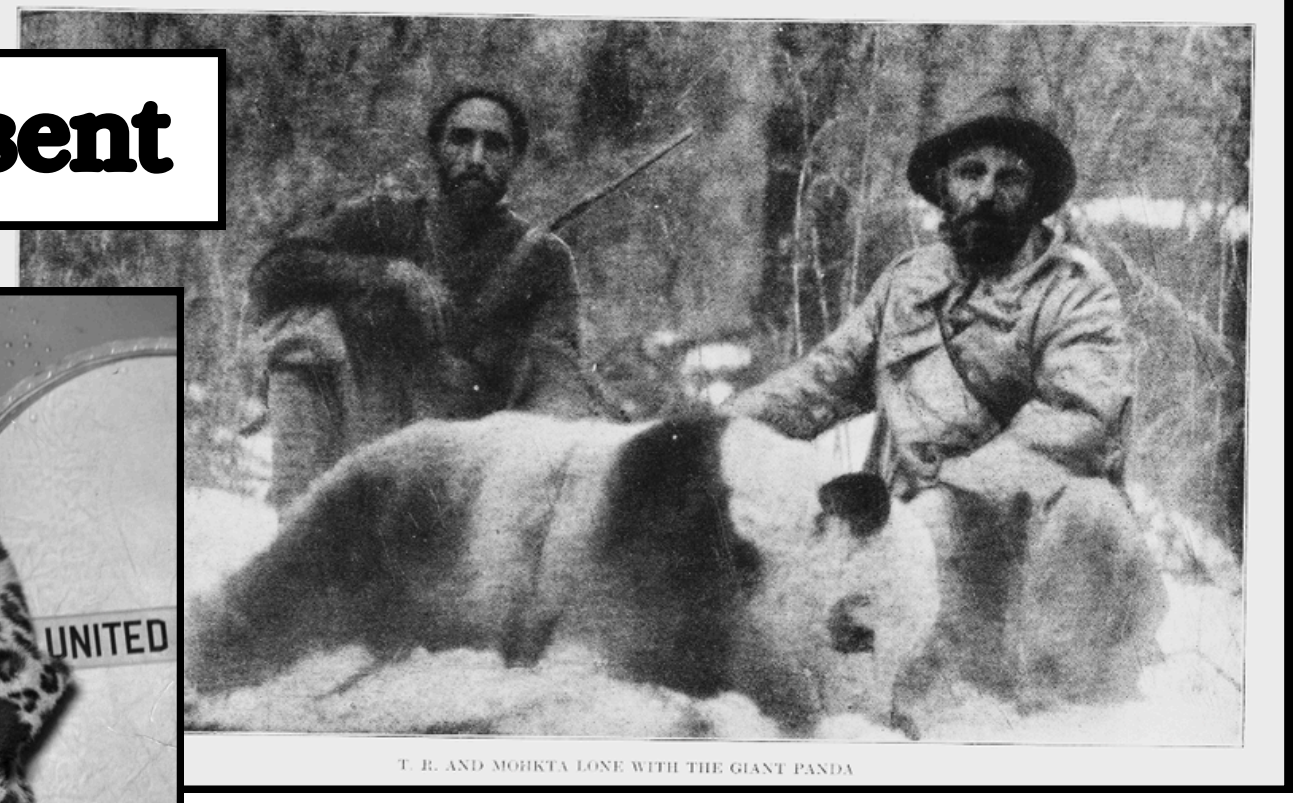
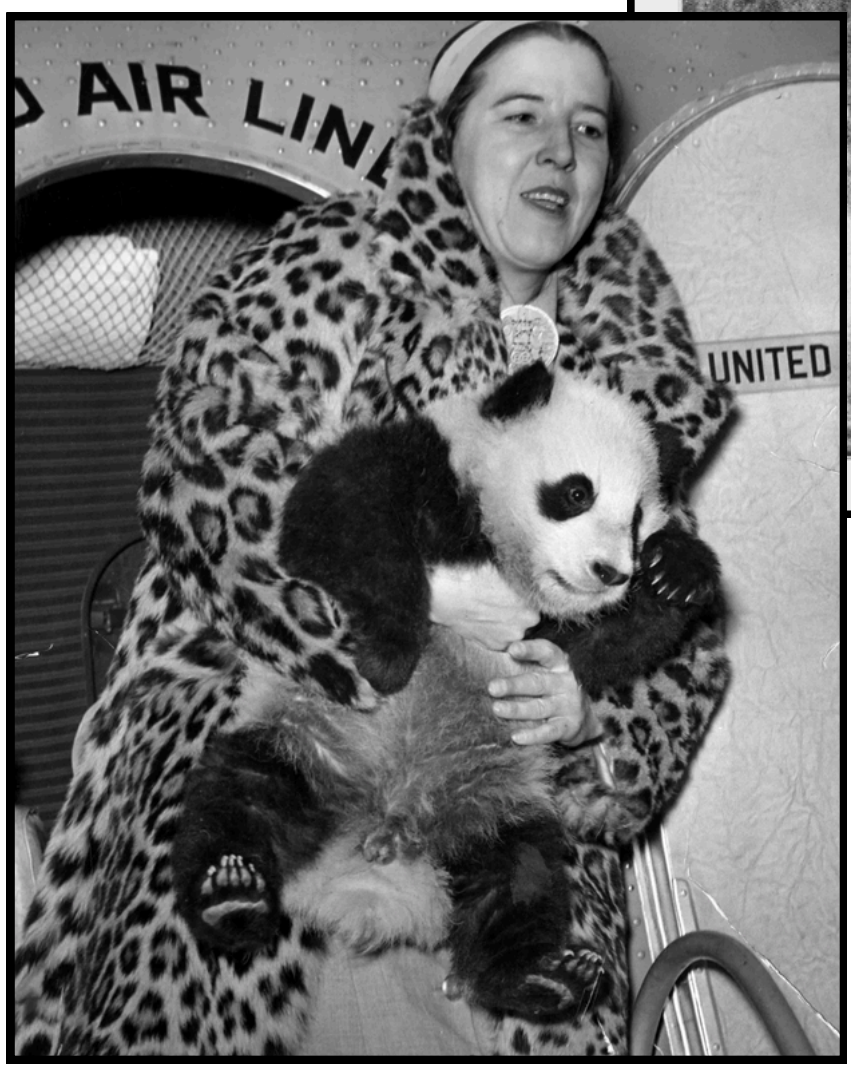
PANDAS, CAPITALISTS, COLONIZERS, ZOOS, & GEOPOLITICS

Why are there pandas in United States zoos?

1929 - Present



T. R. AND MOHKTA LONE WITH THE GIANT PANDA





[TRIBUNE Photo.]

The Brookfield zoo's new 60 pound baby giant panda (at right) meeting Mei-Mei, future playmate, after arrival yesterday. Both the new arrival and Mei-Mei are natives of Szechuan province in western China.

Capital, Colonialism, & Imperialism exploit:

People

Animals

Ecosystems

1936





Su Lin



Ruth Harkness

Ruth Harkness was a wealthy Chicago & New York socialite.

Her late husband, William, co-founded the **Wrigley Company**.

In **1936**, she traveled to China to capture a live panda.

Her team found a baby boy panda and kept his mother at bay.

She named the baby panda **Su Lin** (“a little bit of something cute”).

Note that Harkness is wearing other animals’ fur in this and the previous picture.

Why did Harkness want a panda?

Every zoo in America and Europe would have prized a live Panda highly; the first zoological garden to obtain one would indeed be lucky. Dr. Raymond Ditmars of the Bronx Zoo had always placed the Giant Panda at the head of the list of the few remaining prize mammals which no zoo in the world had ever had. But the chances of capturing a live Giant Panda seemed pretty slim, for so many expeditions had failed in even seeing or shooting one.

—When I said I was going to hunt for a Giant Panda, people in New York told me that I was crazy. Most of them had never heard of the animal—they thought I meant giant panther. I didn't know much about them myself, nor did anyone else. But I wanted to know more; I wanted a live one.



SU LIN WITH MRS. HARKNESS (*Lotte Jacobi*)

She did it for clout.

She admits that she didn't even know much about them.

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE



Harkness wrestled with cognitive dissonance on her expedition.

She already felt bad for animals in zoos and knew that she'd eventually lose interest in a captured panda.

I began to wonder if I really wanted a Panda; I knew I'd feel so sorry for him that after a little while I'd want to let him go back to the jungles he loved, safe from human beings whose very scent he would fear. Always when I go to the zoo, I feel sorry for the lions and tigers who pace their cages remembering the beautiful, free forests they have known. For the animals who have been born in captivity it isn't so bad; they never knew what freedom was like.

GUILT & MATERNAL DELUSION



Harkness felt guilty for taking **Su Lin** from his mother.

She tried to think of herself as Su Lin's surrogate mother.

Harkness thought Su Lin was a girl

The little animal nuzzled in my coat. She was too tiny, too newly born to know that I wasn't her mother. She was hungry, and the little cry, so like a real baby's, was pitiful. The nursing bottle and the dried milk were not in the nearest camp; they were in the camp far down the valley below. We must hurry back.

chilly or just lonesome for her mother, so I would take her into bed with me. After all, I felt badly to have taken her from the mother our hunters had frightened away, so I felt I would have to make up to her for the loss of her mother. She would cry a little and then snuggle down in my hair, or go to sleep sucking the lobe of my ear.

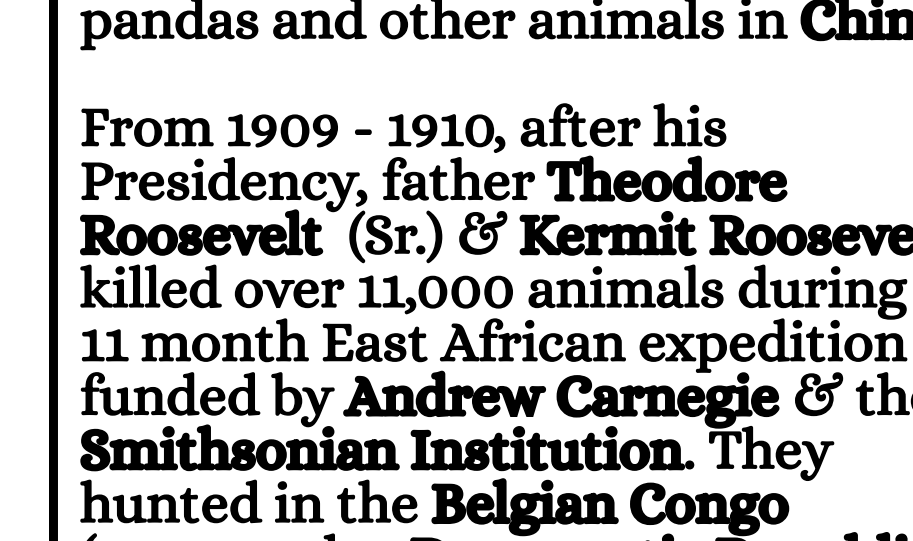
7 YEARS EARLIER

In **1929**, an expedition led by Chicago's **Field Museum** and former US President Theodore Roosevelt's sons (**Theodore Jr** & **Kermit**) hunted pandas and other animals in **China**.

From 1909 - 1910, after his Presidency, father **Theodore Roosevelt** (Sr.) & **Kermit Roosevelt** killed over 11,000 animals during an 11 month East African expedition funded by **Andrew Carnegie** & the **Smithsonian Institution**. They hunted in the **Belgian Congo** (present-day **Democratic Republic of the Congo**), **British East Africa** (**Kenya**), **Anglo-Egyptian Sudan**, and **British Uganda.**

From 1933 - 1945, Roosevelt's niece **Eleanor Roosevelt** was First Lady of the United States after marrying her fifth cousin, **Franklin Delano Roosevelt** (**FDR**).

FDR was Governor-Elect of New York in 1929.





ROOSEVELTS BAG A PANDA.

Cat-Footed Bear of the Himalayas First Shot by White Men.

Special to The New York Times.

T. R. AND MOHKTA LONE WITH THE GIANT PANDA

"First Shot by White Men"

The **1929** American hunters killed one giant panda, bought another one's skin.

They killed and brought back about **5,000 birds**, **2,000 mammals**, and several live animals.

These included a mother/father/child white-faced gibbons, a Bay Bamboo rat, a sun bear, and a Himalayan bear.

The American hunters were living an Orientalist fantasy:

> After passing from the Red Sea I always feel that I am really East, where a European is a spectator, never an integral part of the deep-seated life.

– Theodore Roosevelt Jr.

"We were extremely lucky, as a matter of fact, for after only four hours of tracking we discovered the beast taking its noonday siesta," **Kermit Roosevelt** said.

"My brother and I approached carefully, fired simultaneously and got him. The [hired locals] with us refused to bring the animal into their village. It seems the giant panda is a sort of minor deity among them."

Harkness shows off Su Lin in New York

Every American who has ever shot a Panda came to see the live baby one—Colonel Roosevelt, Mr. Sage and Mr. Brooke Dolan, who has been far into the mountains of Su Lin's country on hunting trips for the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences. The

Ruth Harkness was proud of the celebrities and panda-killers who came to see baby **Su Lin.**



One of the people in New York who came often to call on my Baby Panda was Mr. Dean Sage, Jr. Mr. Sage was one of the three non-Chinese people besides the Roosevelts who had organized an expedition which had succeeded in shooting a Panda. He fell in love with Su Lin as so many other people did. One evening just after she had finished her bottle, he picked her up, held her in his arms, much, I'm sure, as he would hold one of his own children, and said, "I'd *never* be able to shoot another Panda."

After holding baby Su Lin, one of the panda killers said, "I'd *never* be able to shoot another one."



Harkness with Su Lin at Chicago's Brookfield Zoo



1938

In 1938, **Harkness** returned to **China** and captured a second panda, **Mei Mei** ("little sister," a girl).

Harkness gave Mei Mei to **Chicago**'s **Brookfield Zoo**, where **Su Lin** was kept.

The two did not get along, despite hopes that they would breed.



Mei Mei

RIP



1938

In 1938, 2 year old baby **Su Lin died** of pneumonia **two weeks after Mei Mei's arrival.**



Giant Pandas live up to **20 years in the wild.**

Even in death, **Su Lin's** corpse is on display at the **Field Museum** in **Chicago** as a curiosity.

The Field Museum also possesses the corpse of the Giant Panda that Pres. Roosevelt's sons killed in 1929.

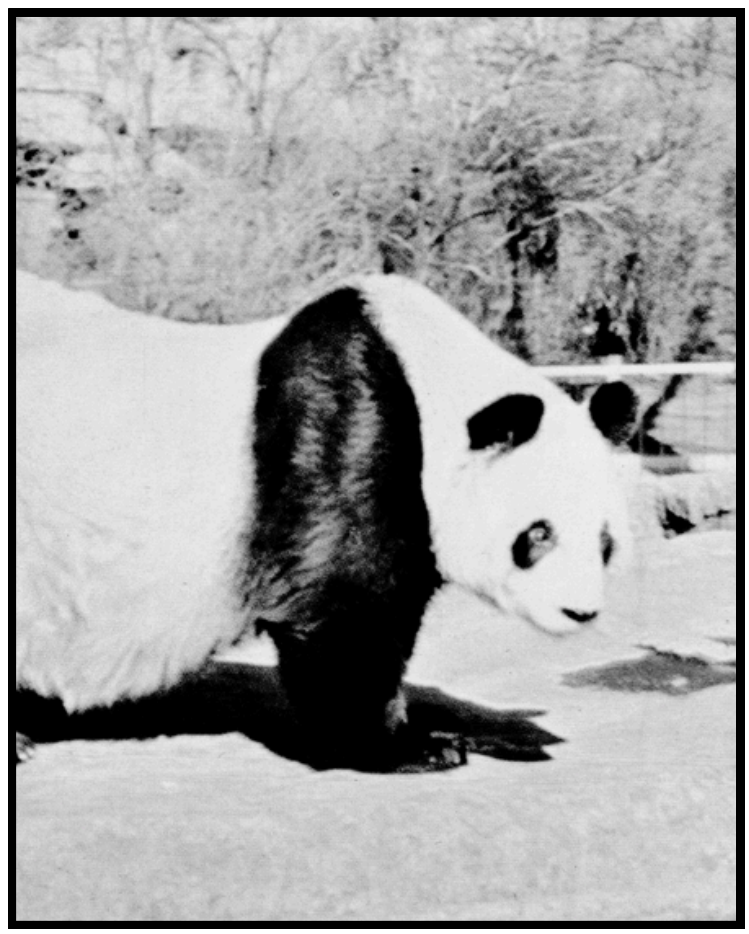
Mei Lan

1939

In **November 1939**, during the **Chinese Civil War** and beginning of **WWII**, the **Chicago Daily News** newspaper sponsored an expedition to **China** to capture a third Giant Panda. They caught a baby boy, named him **Mei Lan** (“flower beauty”), and brought him to **Chicago’s Brookfield Zoo**.



The Brookfield zoo's new 60 pound baby giant panda (at right) meeting Mei-Mei, future playmate, after arrival yesterday. Both the new arrival and Mei-Mei are natives of Szechuan province in western China.









Officials hoped that Mei Lan and Mei Mei would breed.

China’s Chicago Consul General Dr. Tzechin Lu participated in the zoo’s welcome ceremony. The consulate represented **Chiang Kai-shek**’s **Nationalist Government of the Republic of China (ROC)** during the **Chinese Civil War**.

The US used the pandas for propaganda during World War II.

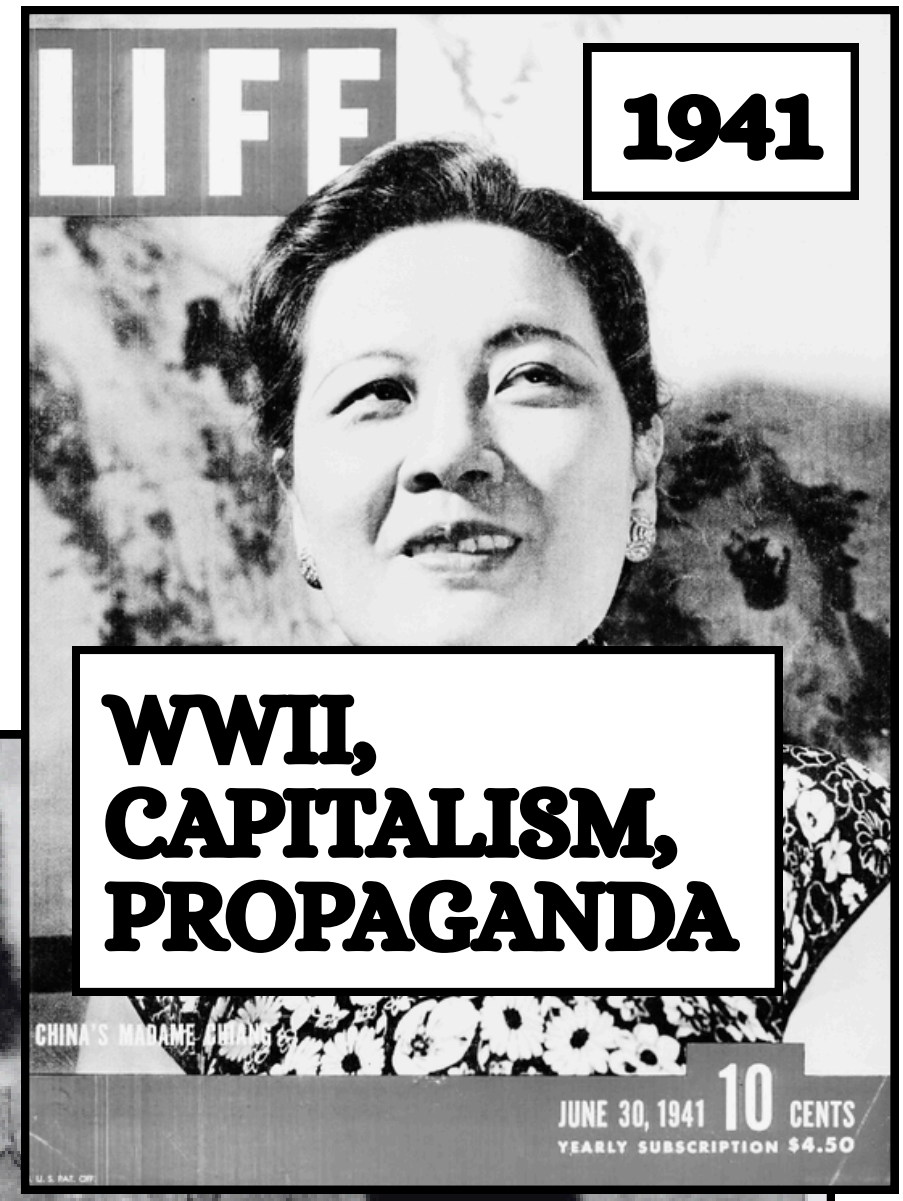


Mei Mei

The **United States** used Mei Mei and Mei Lan to build public support for the **Republic of China**.

The pro-Western/pro-Capitalist **Republic of China (ROC)** under **Chiang Kai-shek** was an ally in **WWII**.

Chiang Kai-shek's Republic of China opposed **Mao Zedong's Communist People's Republic of China** in the **Chinese Civil Wars**.



WWII, CAPITALISM, PROPAGANDA

Today, the Republic of China (ROC) controls **Taiwan**.

Kai-shek's wife **Soong Mei-ling** went to college in the United States.

Soong made diplomatic fundraising trips to the United States during the Chinese Civil War and World War II, raising **millions of dollars** in aid from the US.

MEI-MEI, BROOKFIELD ZOO'S FEMALE PANDA, CLIMBS UP TO TOP OF LOG PLAY RAMP AND CONFRONTS MEI-LAN, THE MALE PANDA, WHO SEEMS SURPRISED AT HER INTENTIONS

PANDA LOVE

MEI-MEI COURTS HER BEAU AND GETS NOWHERE AT ALL

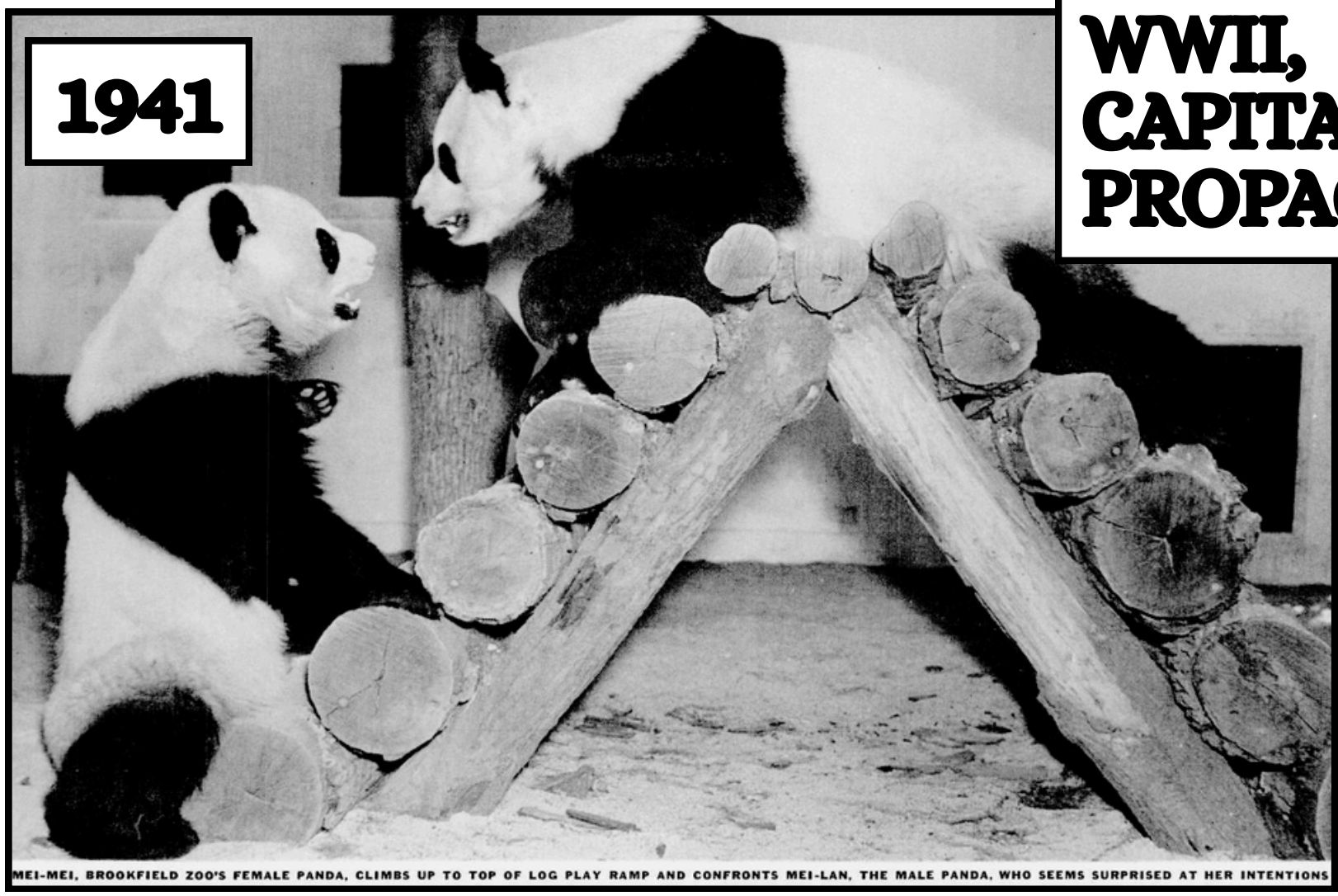
If the insurance policies had arrived earlier, Mei-Mei might now be an expectant mother and Mei-Lan an expectant father. Mei-Mei, 3 years old, and Mei-Lan, 2½, are the giant pandas at the Brookfield Zoo in Chicago. Mei-Mei has been there since 1938 and Mei-Lan, who came over as a baby, has been there since the fall of 1939. Until this year, the Zoo's two life insurance policies on its pandas did not cover death from mating. The Zoo felt it wasn't necessary. But this year, it decided Mei-Lan was old enough and applied to Lloyd's of London for mating coverage. Pandas mate in early April but by the time the laggard policies arrived, early April and the mating season had come and gone. So had Mei-Mei's chances of having a family this year.

Until the policies came, the pandas had been kept apart although they had already made friends and used to sleep with noses touching through the wire fence between their cages. When Mei-Lan was finally let into Mei-Mei's cage, he proved a sad disappointment. He was shy and Mei-Mei had to make all the advances. As these pictures show, her unmaidenly efforts got Mei-Mei absolutely nowhere.

Since their first meeting, however, Mei-Lan has proved himself more of a man. But now Mei-Mei doesn't seem very much interested in him. She acts a little disappointed. Zoo keepers think that she may find Mei-Lan a little young. It may be that the zoo miscalculated and that at 2½, a giant panda has not yet come of age.

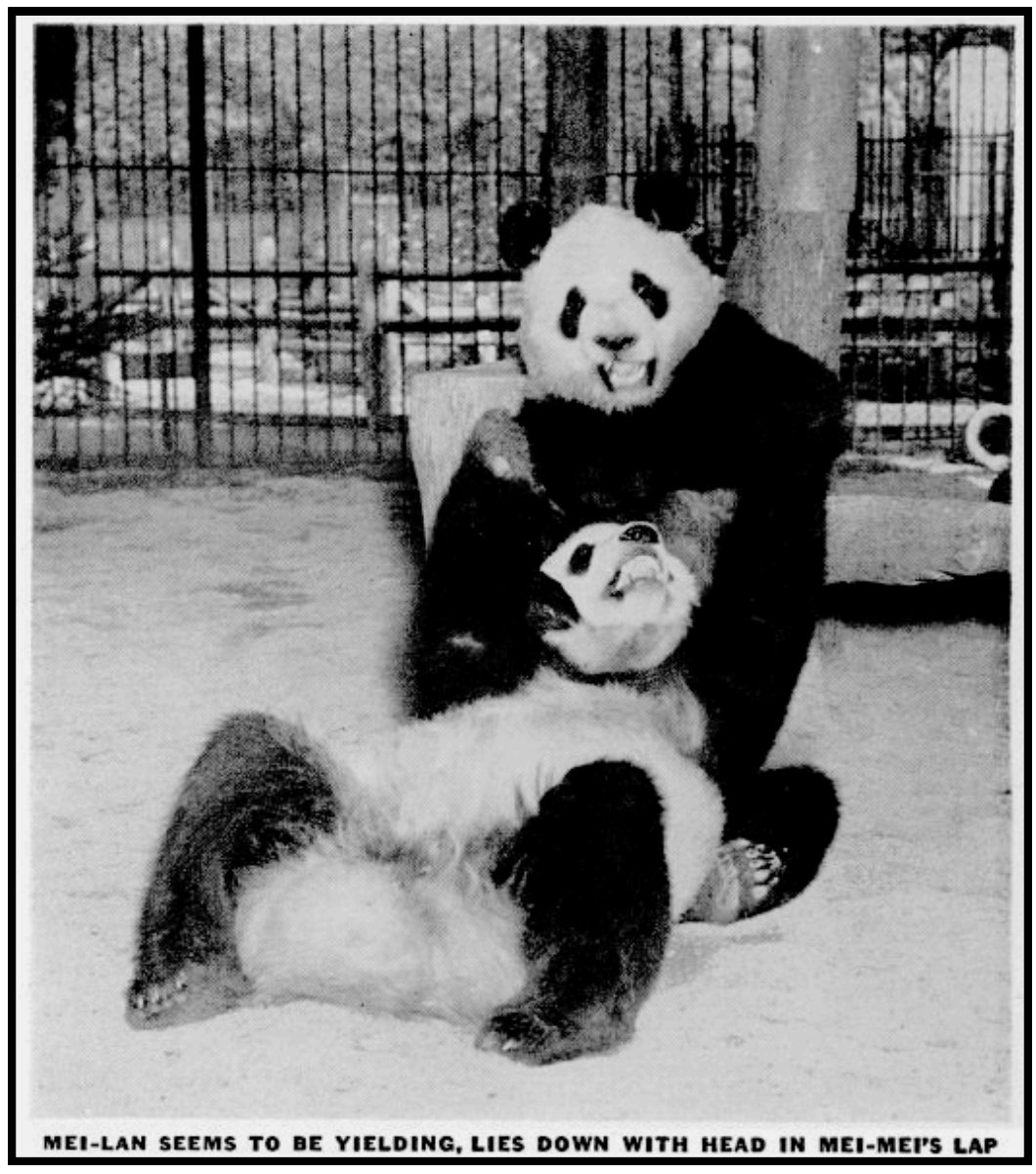
WWII, CAPITALISM, PROPAGANDA

1941



MEI-MEI, BROOKFIELD ZOO'S FEMALE PANDA, CLIMBS UP TO TOP OF LOG PLAY RAMP AND CONFRONTS MEI-LAN, THE MALE PANDA, WHO SEEMS SURPRISED AT HER INTENTIONS

The propagandists used a "Will they? Won't they?" framing to push the story.



MEI-LAN SEEMS TO BE YIELDING, LIES DOWN WITH HEAD IN MEI-MEI'S LAP

1941

WWII, CAPITALISM, PROPAGANDA

The propagandists used a "Will they? Won't they?" framing to push the story.



AT THE BOTTOM OF THE PLAY RAMP, MEI-MEI GRABS MEI-LAN'S HIND PAW. SHE IS A PERSEVERING PANDA AND WILL NOT BE PUT OFF BY MEI-LAN'S OBVIOUS RELUCTANCE

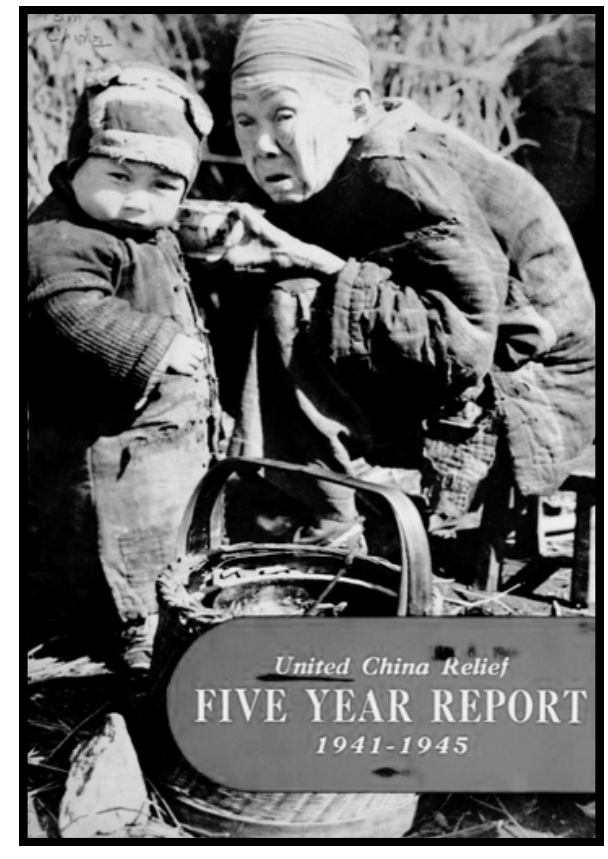
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Slut-shaming Mei Mei

Toxic masculinity towards Mei Lan

Theodore Roosevelt Jr (1929 panda killer) and his cousin **Eleanor Roosevelt** (then-President **FDR**'s wife) were on the board of ***United China Relief***, which organized **Soong Mei-ling (Mdm. Chiang Kai-shek)**'s fundraising tour.



MAO ZEDONG & PANDA DIPLOMACY

After winning the **Chinese Civil War**, **Mao Zedong**'s **People's Republic of China (PRC)** continued Panda Diplomacy.

In **1972**, Mao gave US President **Richard Nixon** two pandas (**Ling-Ling** - "darling little girl" and **Hsing-Hsing** - "shining star").

1972



Mao & Nixon

Between 1957 and 1983, the **PRC** gave 24 pandas as gifts to the Soviet Union, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Mexico, Japan, France, Spain, and West Germany.



Nixon with Ling-Ling and Hsing-Hsing

WWF

The UK pandas inspired the **World Wildlife Fund**'s logo.

RICHARD NIXON & MUSK OX DIPLOMACY

In return for **Mao's** gifted pandas, **Richard Nixon** gave Mao two musk oxen (**Milton** and **Matilda**).

1972



A healthy Milton the musk ox in the Peking zoo.



The Smithsonian's Director brought the musk oxen to China and accompanied the pandas to the US

1984 – Switch to leases; not gifts

In 1984 **China** leased two pandas (**Yun Yun** - "cloud" and **Ying Xin** - "welcome") to **Los Angeles** during the **Summer Olympics**.



United Press International

One of arriving giant pandas—neither the zoologists nor anyone else seemed to be able to quickly tell which was the male and which the female—peers unenthusiastically from airport cage.

L.A. Rolls Out the Red Carpet for 2 Pandas' Olympic Visit

1991

In 1991, **China** switched to 10 year leases that included **PRC** ownership of babies born during the lease.

2019



Chinese President **Xi Jinping** gave **Vladimir Putin's Russia** two pandas (**Ru Yi** - "as one wishes" and **Ding Ding** - "a little girl").

RETALIATORY PANDA DIPLOMACY

Taiwan

2005

TAIPEI TIMES

Home / Taiwan News

Tue, May 03, 2005

MAC looks gift pandas in the mouth; says `no thanks'

CNA

The government will not accept the pandas that China reportedly is planning to give Taiwan if Beijing attempts to downgrade Taiwan's status to become part of China through the gift, Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) Chairman Joseph Wu (吳釗燮) said yesterday.

In 2005, **China** offered panda gifts to **Taiwan** after right-wing **Kuomintang** opposition party leaders visited mainland China.

Taiwan, under the independence-minded **Democratic Progressive Party**, rejected the offer to avoid promoting Chinese propaganda seeking and appeasing mainland China's claimed ownership of Taiwan.

2008

In 2008, **Taiwan**'s right-wing **Kuomintang** party took power and accepted two pandas from **Beijing**.



Beijing named the pandas **Tuan Tuan** and **Yuan Yuan**. "Tuan Yuan" means "reunion," i.e. mainland China taking over Taiwan.

Taiwanese legislator **Twu Shiing-jer** called the pandas "unification propaganda." He said, "We should give them new names: 'Independence' and 'Establish a New Country."

Taiwan's **Democratic Progressive Party** Chairwoman **Tsai Ing-wen** said "**China** has long used pandas as political weapons and **Taiwan** is no exception."

RETALIATORY PANDA DIPLOMACY

2020's – **China** repossessed pandas from the **US** and **UK** after years of souring diplomatic relations from US tariffs, anti-China sentiment surrounding the **COVID-19** pandemic, and US Speaker of the House **Nancy Pelosi**'s visit to **Taiwan** (and the ensuing **Fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis**).

DAILY COMMENT

WHAT COMES AFTER PANDA DIPLOMACY?

Biden meets with President Xi as U.S.-China relations get less warm and fuzzy.



By Robin Wright

November 14, 2023



2025

The End of Panda Diplomacy?

The giant pandas have left Washington. Some fans find it unbearable.





By Edward Wong Photographs and Video by Erin Schaff

Edward Wong is a diplomatic correspondent and former Beijing bureau chief who visits the National Zoo about once a month. Erin Schaff saw the pandas for the first time in their final week at the zoo.

Nov. 8, 2023

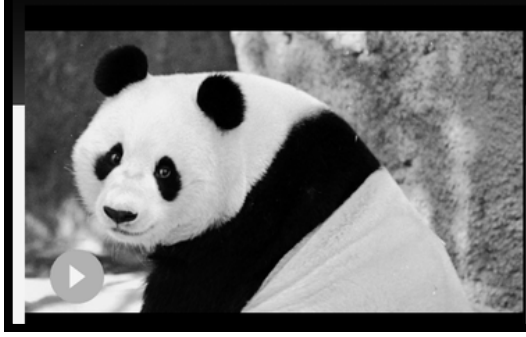
阅读简体中文版 閱讀繁體中文版

In 2025, **China** gave the **US** two new pandas (**Bao Li** and **Qing Bao**). Chinese President **Xi Jinping** said the pandas were "envoys of friendship between the Chinese and American peoples."

AP

U.S. NEWS

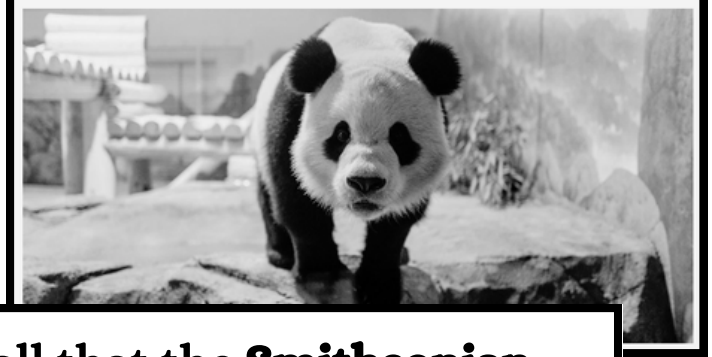
Black and white and adored all over. China pledges pair of pandas for San Diego Zoo



SMITHSONIAN'S NATIONAL ZOO & CONSERVATION BIOLOGY INSTITUTE

October 15, 2024

Giant Pandas Arrive at Smithsonian's National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute From China



Recall that the **Smithsonian** funded former President **Theodore Roosevelt's 1909 - 1910** safari killing spree in colonial **East Africa**.

RETALIATORY PANDA DIPLOMACY

Japan & Taiwan

2025



In 2025, after **Japan**'s Prime Minister **Sanae Takaichi** said Japan could respond militarily to a hypothetical **Chinese** attack on **Taiwan**, Beijing repossessed Tokyo's pandas (**Xiao Xiao** - "light of dawn turning brighter" and **Lei Lei** - "a bud becoming a beautiful flower").

Reuters

Japan's last two giant pandas are headed to China and fans just can't bear it

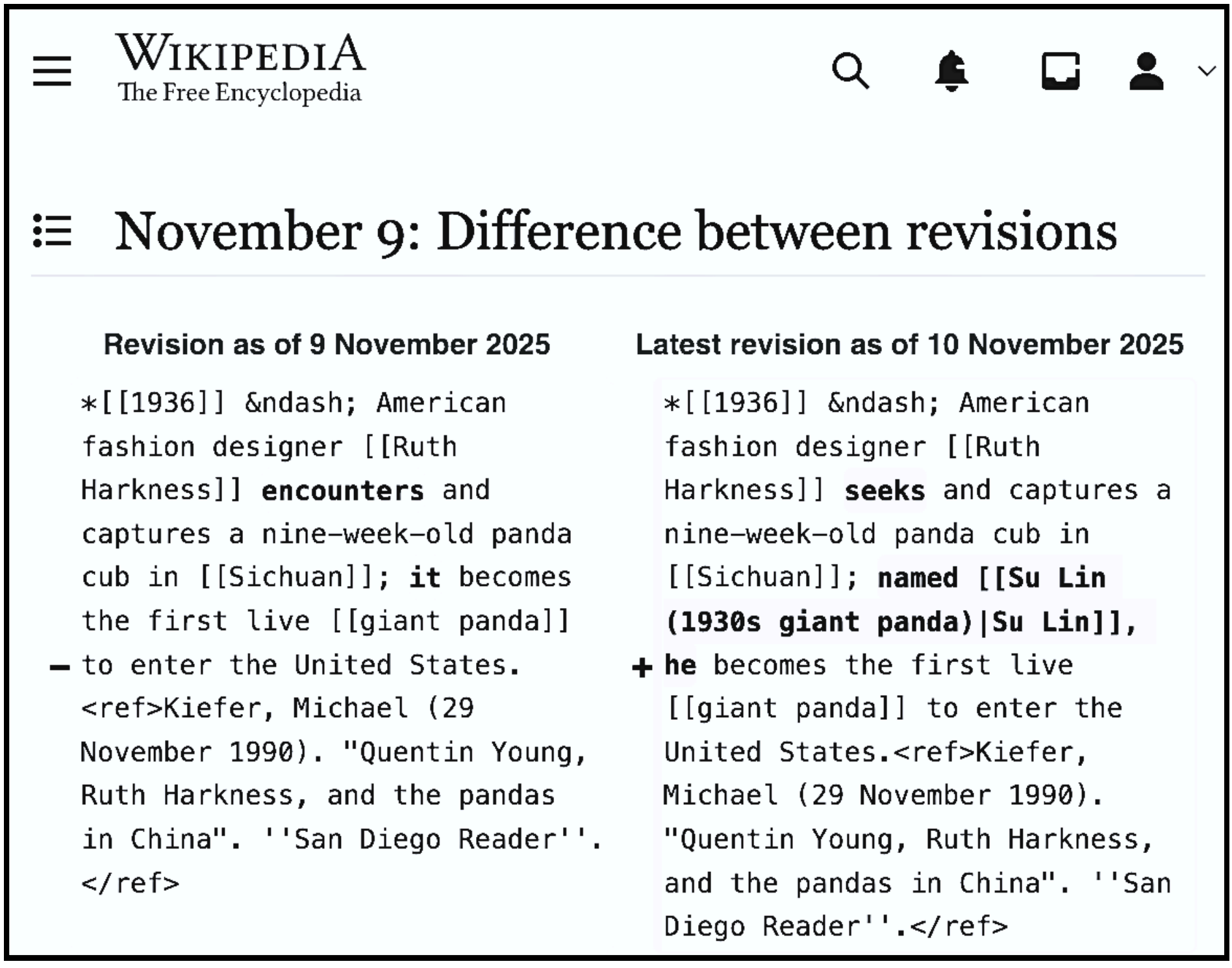
By Joseph Campbell

December 16, 2025 8:14 AM PST · Updated December 16, 2025



INDIVIDUALS, NOT OBJECTS

Although politicians, socialites, and marketers see pandas as instruments & objects, we must always remember that each panda is an individual with their own experiences, desires, suffering, and families.





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