



# On the Birth of XiangXiang



At 255 days, XiangXiang looks doing fine by herself, 23 February 2018  
Photo: PhotoLover/PIXTA

The birth this summer of a giant panda cub at Tokyo's Ueno Zoo has sparked a frenzy of public interest and promises a multi-billion-yen cash injection for the capital city.

**Sano Kentaro, freelance writer**

**O**n 12 June 2017, Japan was delighted by the birth of a giant panda cub at Tokyo's Ueno Zoo (Ueno Zoological Gardens). The moment media outlets reported this first birth in five years, local shops launched panda-themed sales campaigns and many messages of celebration could be seen on social media. The mother panda, ShinShin (11 years old at the time), had been removed from public display on May 25, and Japan — along with the father panda, RiRi (11 years old at the time) — eagerly awaited the birth of the cub.

The first body measurement, conducted on June 14, revealed that the cub was 14.3 centimeters tall and weighed 147 grams. On June 22, ten days after the birth, the cub was discovered to be female by specialists at Ueno Zoo and the Chinese Giant Panda Protection and Research Center. Thirty days after the birth, the cub had grown to 29.5 centimeters tall and 1,147.8 grams and the patterns on her body increasingly looked like a panda. In the 12th body measurement, conducted on September 20, 100 days after the birth, the cub was 65.0 centimeters tall and 6.0 kilograms in weight, demonstrating healthy growth.

The cub's name, XiangXiang (香香), was decided on September 25. It was chosen from more than 320,000 ideas. Ueno Zoo explained that the Chinese character 香 has the bright image of flowers blooming. XiangXiang was unveiled six months after her birth.



At 236 days old, XiangXiang is walking around her mother, ShinShin, 4 February 2018.  
Photo: Hayabusa/PIXTA

### **Very Important Pandas**

According to Miyamoto Katsuhiro, Professor Emeritus at Kansai University, factoring in admission fees, XiangXiang goods and an increase in sales for shopping streets in neighboring areas, the cub will yield about 26.7 billion yen for Tokyo. The panda is popular for her cuteness among young and old, men and women. However, the popularity of pandas is not limited to XiangXiang. It is easy to find items related to pandas on the street and in homes, such as novelty products, advertisements, accessories and clothes. Pandas are so trendy that they draw many

customers and visitors to zoos anywhere they can be seen. This is why people call popular TV personalities that attract many people to events “customer-drawing pandas.”

On 28 October 1972, forty-five years ago, the first pandas arrived in Japan. Male KangKang (estimated 2 years old) and female LanLan (estimated 4 years old) arrived at Haneda Airport (now Tokyo International Airport) in a special Japan Airlines plane. As concerned people and the media watched, a police car escorted the truck carrying the pandas to Ueno Zoo, 24 kilometers north. It was almost VIP treatment. KangKang and LanLan were unveiled on November 5. About 50,000 people gathered at Ueno Zoo and waited in line to see the first cute pandas in Japan. Even if they waited in line for two hours, they could only see the pandas for 30 seconds. Only about 20,000 of those people in line were actually able to see the pandas, but everyone waited patiently.

Pandas are rare animals. Japan, which received the pandas as gifts, did not know much about them, such as their biology or how to raise them. The zoo staff anxiously made preparations for the unveiling of the pandas, concerned about exposing them to stress because so many people would visit the zoo as well as the possibility of accidents happening to such precious gifts from a neighboring country. That hard work resulted in the successful unveiling of the pandas.

Although LanLan died in 1979 and KangKang in 1980, 32 million people came to see them over the years. Looking at the cute pandas, people impatiently looked forward to the birth of their cubs. However, that wish did not come true and LanLan entered critical condition. The media reports about her were also similar to VIP treatment and the story received major coverage in newspapers. Ueno Zoo received telephone calls and flowers from across the country wishing for LanLan’s recovery. But that wish also did not come true. LanLan died on September 4. Many people, adults and children, gathered at a service for LanLan and left piles of candles and letters. LanLan and KangKang were carefully preserved as stuffed specimens at Tama Zoological Park.

## **Panda Diplomacy**

Giant pandas inhabit Sichuan Province in China and receive that country’s highest level of protection. Japan’s then-Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei’s visit to China on 25 September 1972 created the background for the arrival of pandas in Japan.

After World War II, exchanges between Japan and China were limited to the private sector, despite the countries’ geographic proximity. The surprising announcement in July 1971 of the scheduled February 1972 visit of United States President Richard M. Nixon to China encouraged Tanaka to visit China.

During Tanaka’s visit, both countries held several discussions. On September 29, Japan agreed on a joint statement with then-Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai and was able to achieve a normalization of diplomatic relations. KangKang and LanLan, healthy and cute pandas with fortuitous black patterns around their eyes that resembled the Chinese character 八, were presented to Japan as commemorative gifts.

China had given pandas to the United States earlier, before Japan. The official normalization of diplomatic relations between the United States and China was achieved in 1979. This process began at a summit meeting in February 1972, and China decided to send two pandas to the United

States as gifts. Within two months after their official introduction at the National Zoo in Washington D.C., the pandas had won over the hearts of the American people. It is said that American sentiment toward China improved significantly.

This experience is rumored to have inspired Zhou Enlai to present pandas to Japan as gifts. This is the so-called panda diplomacy of the 1940s. Needless to say, LanLan and KangKang were welcomed as a symbol of Japanese and Chinese friendship. The pandas had a much larger effect than expected in Japan. Probably because the Japanese people are less aware of politics and diplomatic intentions, the pandas are widely beloved as a cultural symbol.

This innocent love of pandas may be similar to the Japanese people's love of cherry blossoms. Every Japanese person anticipates the blooming of cherry blossoms and is concerned about the rain or wind, wishing the flowers would always exist. Poet Ariwara no Narihira (825–880) expressed the heart of the Japanese people, "If it were not for cherry blossoms in the world, our hearts in spring would be more peaceful and calm." (Murahata Yoshiko, Director, Japanese Cultural Center, MFWI, Volume XXII Number 4, Japanese Cultural Center Newsletter, April 2013, <http://www.mfwi.edu/JCC/PDFs/April13.pdf>)

## The Protection of Pandas

According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the number of wild pandas had recovered to 1,864 as of 2015, or a total of 2,060 including cubs.

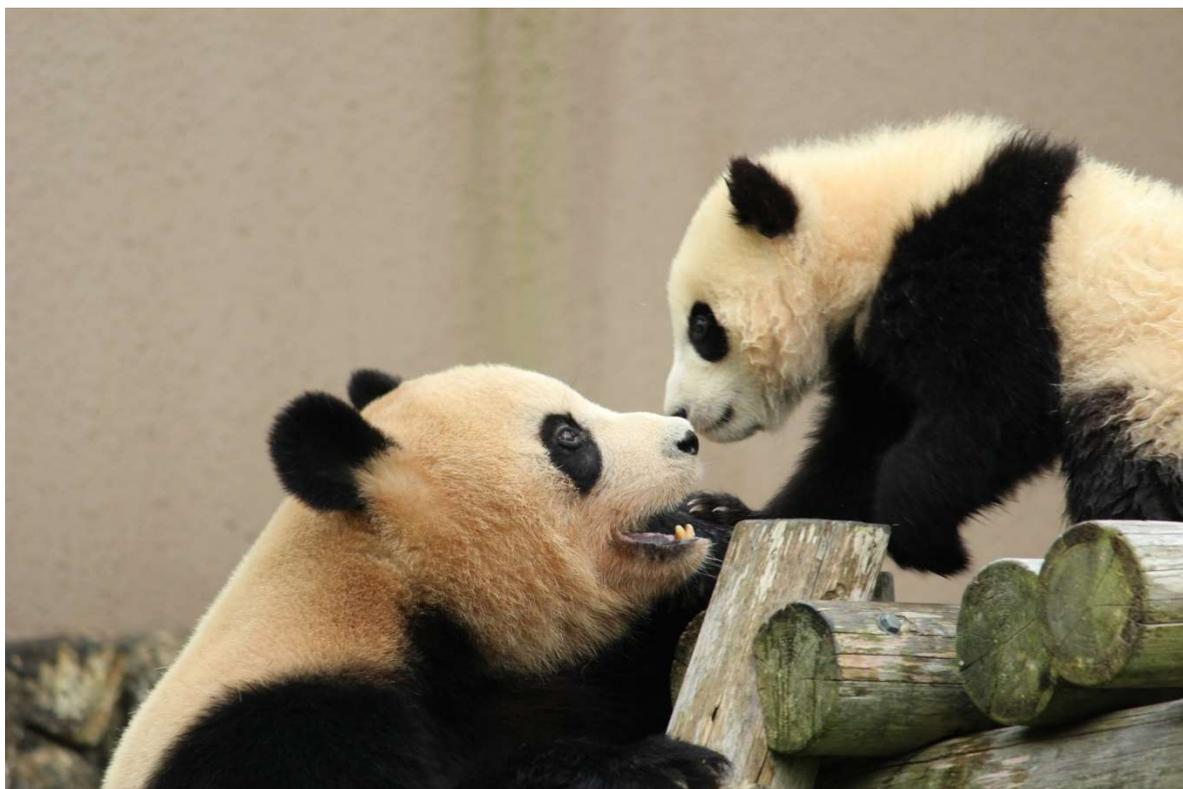
However, according to surveys conducted by the Chinese government from 1985 to 1988, there were 1,114 wild pandas. Pandas subsist on bamboo and adult pandas are said to eat 15 to 25 kilograms of bamboo daily. As China develops economically, it is concerning that the area of the bamboo forests where pandas live will decrease. In response to a local survey by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) in 1981, China moved to protect the pandas, including the establishment of preservation areas. In addition, China joined the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora that same year and pandas, once treated as diplomatic gifts, became available on a short-term loan basis for research. Subsequently, the loan period for joint research and support for protection was extended to ten years at a WWF conference in 1993. It was decided that loan fees should be about 1 million US dollars annually for a pair of male and female pandas. Cubs born from offered pandas must be returned to China when they reach the age of two.

Based on this principle and under an agreement on joint panda research for their preservation between the Tokyo Metropolitan Government and the China Wildlife Conservation Association signed in July 2010, RiRi and ShinShin, the parents of XiangXiang, were offered to Ueno Zoo as part of "support for wild animal protection projects" in February 2011. The loan period was for ten years with a loan fee of 950,000 US dollars per year for the pair.

As of June 2017, 67 pandas (19 offspring) have been raised in nineteen countries and regions, including Japan. The United States has the largest number of offered pandas (13), followed by Japan (9) — two adults and a cub for Ueno Zoo, five (one adult male, one adult female and three female cubs) for Adventure World in Shirahama Town, Wakayama Prefecture, and one adult

female for Kobe Oji Zoo in Kobe, Hyogo Prefecture. In particular, Adventure World has successfully bred a number of pandas, a difficult feat, and is recognized globally for birthing 15 pandas, from 2000 to 2016. Adventure World returned the 11 pandas that it had successfully bred from 2004 to June 2017 to China.

Someday XiangXiang will return to China. Although people are aware of this, the panda enthusiasts' cries of disappointment at parting with XiangXiang seem to be heard even now.



A giant panda and cub at Adventure World in Shirahama Town, Wakayama Prefecture. Adventure World has five pandas on loan from China: one adult male, one adult female and three female cubs.  
Photo: miya/PIXTA

## Symbols of Japan-China Friendship

On 28 September 2017, Japanese Foreign Minister Kono Taro participated in a reception in commemoration of the 45th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and China, and the 68th anniversary of the establishment of the People's Republic of China. He said the following.

*On 29 September 1972, Japan and China signed a joint statement in Beijing and created a new historic chapter. One month later, the first two pandas, KangKang and LanLan, were presented to Japan as gifts from China as a symbol of friendship between our two countries. This year, Ueno Zoological Gardens is in a festive mood once again because of the birth of the cub, XiangXiang (香香). ... I sincerely*

*hope that XiangXiang, born in a celebratory year, will grow healthily along with the development of friendship and cooperation between Japan and China.*

Japan and China are neighbors, just across the water from each other. Irrespective of global changes, their bilateral relations are among the world's most important.

In 2006, during Prime Minister Abe Shinzo's first tenure, he officially visited China on his first overseas tour after his inauguration and presented the concept of strategically mutual beneficial relations. Despite many issues that emerged subsequently, this has been a basic idea in Japan-China relations that will create a path for the future.

The year 2017 marked the 45th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and China. The year 2018 marks the 40th anniversary of the Japan-China Treaty of Peace and Friendship that was signed on 12 August 1978. During these two years, the local and central governments of Japan and China will carry out many exchange projects, including the nurturing of human resources, culture, sports and tourism, at the level of young administrators, universities and in the private sector.

In December, XiangXiang was introduced and many people visited her. Pandas are a symbol of China, the normalization of Japan-China diplomatic relations and an even greater icon as a subconscious bridge-builder between Japan and China.

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Prime Minister Abe Shinzo speaks at a ceremony held by the Chinese Embassy in Tokyo to mark the 45th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic ties between Japan and China, 28 September 2017. In a letter to Prime Minister Li sent on September 29, Prime Minister Abe wrote, "We would like to build a stable friendship by promoting cooperation and interaction in various fields."

Photo: Cabinet Public Relations Office

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