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Title: *Panda diplomacy*

Location: 62°32'10.4"N 24°11'03.2"E

Animals as diplomatic gifts have long traditions, first known cases having been recorded in ancient Egypt. One of the better-known gift-animals was the elephant named Abul-Abbas, which was gifted to the Frankish ruler Charlemagne (748-814) by the Caliph of Baghdad in 802. As was the case with Charlemagne, by gifting exotic animals to foreign rulers it was hoped that the gift-giver and his or her realm might gain at least some goodwill from the recipient. It seems that most times it worked, and animals received as diplomatic gifts were often exhibited with pride in courts around the world.

Chinese panda diplomacy is, naturally, part of this long continuum, but in the last few decades it has gained its own peculiar characteristics when compared to the "traditional" animal gifts. As the name suggests, panda diplomacy refers to Chinese policy of gifting and, increasingly, renting giant pandas to foreign countries. The first recorded case of panda diplomacy is from the year 685, when two pandas were gifted to the emperor of Japan as a sign of goodwill between the two countries. However, modern panda diplomacy is often traced to a much more recent year of 1957, when a panda was gifted to the Soviet Union by the People's Republic of China, followed by a second bear in 1959. Until the 1980s pandas were given as gifts to friendly, mostly communist, states. In the mid-1980s, pandas increasingly turned into a commodity, and instead of gifting, they have more and more been rented to other countries.

Nevertheless, the goal has remained the same: to win over hearts and minds and as such increase Chinese soft power world-wide. Or at least keep the panda-

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recipient country's media temporarily concentrated on the pandas rather than more negative aspects of the PRC. Indeed, the panda as an animal is a good instrument of diplomacy for China; the bears are cute, furry and were considered endangered for a long time, so they easily evoke positive reactions among people. Furthermore, pandas are often readily associated with China.



A giraffe later known as Zarafa was one of many diplomatic gifts between Charles X of France and Muhammad Ali of Egypt. In 1827 Zarafa was brought from Sudan to Paris where it lived for 18 years. Other two giraffes were sent to London and Vienna.

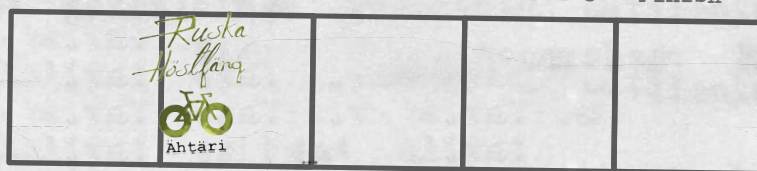
Legacy of the giraffes lives today in various forms such as names of places and pastries.

Panda diplomacy reached Finnish shores in January of 2018, when two Pandas, named Pyry (Finnish word for heavy snowfall) and Lumi (Finnish for snow), arrived to the Ähtäri Zoo. The animals were loaned from China for 15 years for a rent of at least 12 million euros all told. The loan-a-panda deal was negotiated between Finnish president Sauli Niinistö and Chinese president Xi Jinping in April 2017, however, not without controversy. In Finland, president Niinistö was somewhat widely accused of disregarding discussions of human rights in China with Xi in favour of finalizing the panda deal. Niinistö denied such accusations and

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insisted that human rights were discussed more than pandas during the meeting.



Pandas are famous symbols of conservation in part due to being the logo of World Wildlife Fund for Nature. Yet pandas are currently not considered endangered.

Despite the pandas becoming a very popular attraction in the Ähtäri zoo, the ongoing coronavirus pandemic has caused substantial difficulties for the company operating the site. As visitors stayed home during the prolonged lockdown, the economic situation of the already financially strained zoo became even worse. Some rumours even stated that the situation was so dire that the zoo was considering returning the pandas to China. The zoo, however, countered the rumours and stated that such a decision would only be made as a last-ditch effort, and the company was still very far away from being forced to consider returning the animals. Indeed, the pandas are quite expensive to sustain, as in addition to the rent paid to China, one panda eats 40 kilograms of fresh bamboo a day - all of which has to be imported from the Netherlands.

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Images:

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Giraffe_Crossing_(1827)_by_Jacques_Raymond_Brascassat.jpg)

[File:Giraffe_Crossing_\(1827\)_by_Jacques_Raymond_Brascassat.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Giraffe_Crossing_(1827)_by_Jacques_Raymond_Brascassat.jpg)

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