

# **Pandas and Their Contribution to the Modern World**

China is home to some of the world's most diverse species of mammals. Many of these animals make up a large part of Chinese culture and history, however, the animal that has most greatly influenced China is the panda. Pandas have contributed to Chinese culture in many different ways. From their discovery until the modern era, pandas have had a great impact on Chinese society and there are many reasons why the panda is such a valuable animal for the Chinese people. The topics that will be explored in this essay are the history of pandas, their contribution to Chinese culture and identity, as well as the knowledge of pandas on a global scale, and the future of pandas.

Many people in present day society have heard of or have even seen a panda at some point in their life, however, many of these people may not know the true story of pandas. Everyone knows that pandas are black and white bears and they eat bamboo, but no one seems to ask why pandas like to eat bamboo. Actually, a long time ago, pandas did not eat bamboo, in fact, they were carnivores and they enjoyed feeding on small rodents like mice, however, after many years of evolution and adaptation pandas began to develop traits that allowed them to feed on bamboo, some of these traits include, stronger molars and a larger head. Although pandas are herbivores and are generally very solitary, unfortunately, they had a rough history. In 1869 a hunter introduced the panda to the western world,

although it was a very fresh and exciting new discovery during that time the panda would eventually become one of the thousands of endangered species in the world. In less than one hundred years after its exposure to the western world, more than 40 pandas will be taken out of China by foreigners. Luckily, beginning in 1960, many reserves will be established to protect pandas, and decrees were created that prohibited the hunting of pandas. Not long after the reserves were established, a report released by the Ministry of Forestry of China estimated that there were around 2400 pandas that were still living in the wild. Less than 20 years after the report was released, many governments and organizations like the World Wildlife Fund began researching pandas and establishing more wildlife reserves in order to preserve species. Suddenly, many people began to realize how important it was to save and protect the panda bear.

Nowadays, with the expansion of globalization, many people from all across the world are able to learn about other countries, cultures, religions, and many more. When someone who is not from China is asked the question: “What is the first thing you think of when I say the word ‘China’” many will say “pandas”. Pandas are becoming more and more prominent on a global scale, through appearances in the Olympics and the media, the world is beginning to know more and more about pandas and how they are considered a national treasure in China. So why is the panda such an important animal for the Chinese people? First of all, pandas are only found in China as the

mountainous regions and bamboo forests provide ideal living conditions for these creatures. Secondly, pandas are an important symbol of Chinese culture. As the Chinese people see it, the panda possesses many qualities that make them warriors. Pandas are able to find food for themselves, climb trees, and survive in harsh, cold temperatures, furthermore, it is said that pandas have the strength of a tiger. Another reason why the panda holds a significant portion of Chinese culture is a physical characteristic: the colour of their fur. Pandas are black and white, and to Chinese people, it is a direct embodiment of the Yin and Yang, a symbol that represents balance and harmony.

So, what happens now? Well, there are many organizations and laws dedicated to protecting the species, however, although pandas are no longer an endangered species they are still at a high risk, with only 1800 pandas left in the wild it is crucial that all people work together to protect the pandas. Because the panda's' main diet is bamboo, their reliance on bamboo makes them especially vulnerable if their habitats are lost. It is important that pandas are preserved because they play an important role in the ecosystem. Pandas roam around the forests spreading seeds and assisting the growth of vegetation. By making their habitat more sustainable, local citizens are also able to benefit from the increase in quality of life and ecotourism.

Pandas play an important role in the lives and cultures of all Chinese people so it is important to learn more about them. Throughout history, the panda was hunted and smuggled out of their home country which resulted in their endangerment, however, now that there are many reserves and protection laws that have been put into place in order to preserve pandas living in the wild. It is essential for all citizens of the world to work together to save the pandas because they are an important animal in the eyes of the Chinese people. The preservation of pandas is also the preservation of one's culture and identity, they cannot be lost.