

E. Elena Songster. *Panda Nation: The Construction and Conservation of China's Modern Icon*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018. xii, 264 pp. Hardcover \$34.95, ISBN 978-0-19-939367-1.

Many books have been written about the giant panda, undoubtedly one of the most popular—and often considered one of the cutest—animals on Earth.

E. Elena Songster's new book *Panda Nation: The Construction and Conservation of China's Modern Icon* presents the first comprehensive ethnographic account of how the giant panda became a national icon in the context of the rise of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and how this iconic image contributed to the evolution of the identity of the PRC in the international community. In pointing to the book's comprehensiveness, I mean that it encompasses the exercise of state power in the PRC, various historical actors, the giant panda itself, panda reserves, the other animals inhabiting those reserves, the wider environment, and the role of other international players. This combination secures for this book a significant place in contemporary scholarship. It is also noteworthy that the author keeps the book to a moderate length while still addressing political power, human–animal relations, and environmental and ecological concerns.

This book is very impressive in successfully weaving a broad and diverse range of sources into a grand narrative about the giant panda as a precious and rare species, a scientific object, and a political symbol in the history of the PRC. As the author notes, she has drawn on “Chinese- and English-language sources from local, provincial, and national archives, newspapers, scientific articles, governmental policies, surveys, books, and laws, as well as insights from experts, officials, and zookeepers.” She also “analyzes artwork, advertisements, maps, photographs, and statistical data, as well as first-hand observations of the pandas and the habitat itself” (p. 3). Research must have required a painstaking search for sources across genres. Taken together, they illuminate the exercise of PRC state power at the local and central levels.

Aside from a brief introduction outlining the structure of the book and the major research questions and a conclusion reaffirming some of the main arguments, the eight central chapters of the book are arranged in roughly chronological order, with each chapter focusing on one or two particular issues. Chapter 1 offers a brief history of the scientific discoveries and taxonomic debates relating to the giant panda and its fossils beginning in the year 1869, when Fr. David, a French-Catholic missionary, introduced it to the West. From the perspective of the history of science, this chapter argues that the scientific study of the giant panda, and its exclusive existence in China, motivated the PRC to present this animal as a national symbol. Chapter 2 does not directly focus on the giant panda, but rather offers historical, political, and economic

background for the creation of nature reserves for protecting precious and rare animals in the early years of the PRC. It examines the process of establishing Mt. Dinghu the PRC's first nature reserve in 1956 under the influence of Soviet experts. The author suggests that interest in natural preservation was initially limited to the scientific community, but that the central government quickly became involved as part of the socialist state-building project of the 1950s and 1960s. This chapter also investigates the implementation of the government policy of "protecting, rearing, hunting" during the Great Leap Forward and the subsequent strategy of economic recovery.

Chapter 3 returns to the giant panda and discusses how "the creation of the Wanglang Panda Protection Reserve in 1965 demonstrated how a concept such as nature-protection policy could originate in the nation's top legislative body and be transformed into physical reality in the remote mountain ranges of southwestern China" (p. 69). Analyzing data from archives, interviews, and fieldwork, this chapter argues that the creation of the giant panda protection reserve in Wanglang incorporated provincial, local, and individual interests. This research illustrates the process by which the central government, local ethnic minority hunters from the Baima community, and individuals such as Zhong Zhaomin worked together to make the reserve a reality. Chapter 4 traces how the giant panda became a national treasure during the Cultural Revolution. Interestingly, while the Cultural Revolution is often thought of as a catastrophe, by analyzing scientific research on the giant panda and the cultural—especially artistic—visions of the panda, the author suggests that "the Cultural Revolution atmosphere launched the giant panda into the role of national icon" (p. 73).

Chapter 5 discusses the famous practice of "panda diplomacy," but draws particular attention to the profound effects of China's domestic conservation policy on the wild population of the giant panda, which makes it different from many other publications on the subject. Chapter 6 turns to two case studies on the panda rescue movements in 1976 and 1983, and provides a detailed account of how central, provincial, and local government agencies and reserves responded to growing crises of death and disease among the panda population, and eventually how the response to the crisis was transformed into a domestic and international movement to save the giant panda as a Chinese national treasure. The author particularly notes how these movements pushed a number of talented young people to pursue careers in conservation biology and to become specialists focusing on the giant panda (p. 126).

Chapter 7 moves to the reform and opening-up period. First, the author discusses how the Wanglang Reserve for protecting the giant panda became a victim of the flourishing local ethnic ecotourism promoted by the Baima Tibetan community. Next, she gives an account of how the managers of the reserve responded to this problem by transforming it into a cooperative scientific research base open to both domestic and international zoologists,

biologists, and ecologists, as well as conservation experts. The final substantive chapter analyzes how the PRC government shifted from a policy of loaning giant pandas out for short-term celebrations such as the Olympic Games to a policy of arranging long-term loans in order to develop scientific research collaboration. It also examines the political debate over the practice of offering pairs of pandas as gifts across the strait to Taiwan.

This book is strong in its sound analysis, fruitful discussion, and convincing arguments. However, it could be improved in several ways. One puzzle for the reader is that the book seems to put too much weight on the uniqueness of the PRC's state-building enterprises, such that it risks ignoring some political and cultural continuities from the Late Imperial and Republican eras. Another puzzle is the complete neglect of established Japanese scholarship, especially Ienaga Masaki's 家永真幸 work on panda diplomacy (*Panda gaikō* パンダ外交, Tōkyō: Mediafakutorī, 2011; and chapter 6 of his new book *Kokuhō no seijishi: "Chūgoku" no Kokyū to panda* 国宝の政治史: "中国"の故宮とパンダ /, Tōkyō: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 2017, pp. 211–249). These omissions weaken some of the claims made in *Panda Nation*.

For instance, in the introduction, the author notes that “the transformation of the giant panda from its unsung and hidden existence in the remote mountains of western China to a position of national and international recognition and influence is in many ways a byproduct of a larger story: the rise of the People's Republic of China” (p. 1). This is hardly the case; before the founding of the PRC, the giant panda had already won the heart of the British in the 1940s due to Jiang Yi's 蔣彝 writings and paintings, as Ienaga notes in detail in his *Panda Diplomacy* (pp. 41–47). Additionally, *Panda Nation* pays little attention to panda diplomacy during the 1940s, when the government of the Republic of China (ROC) incorporated the giant panda into its grand propaganda project against Japanese invasion, using it to portray China as a peaceful and warm nation deserving of sympathy and support from other nations. In its claim that the panda became an expression of nationalism, a tool for diplomacy, and a means for international cooperation and scientific exchange (p. 5), *Panda Nation* also underestimates the panda's place as the symbol of Chinese culture. This argument omits the role of Jiang Yi's work in England, which painted the giant panda as a symbol of traditional Chinese culture.

Because *Panda Nation* focuses on the PRC, its chapter on panda diplomacy is particularly weak, in that it does not offer sufficient discussion of the international relations between the PRC, Soviet Russia, Britain, and Japan in the second half of the twentieth century. Ienaga's book offers a much better account, including interesting details of how Britain obtained a giant panda from a private business operator in Australia due to the PRC's ban on exporting pandas to enemy nations, and how Britain and Soviet Russia collaborated to mate their pandas in the 1960s (albeit failing to produce a baby), even though

they belonged to opposing political and military camps. *Panda Nation* also fails to examine how panda policy related to the competition for legitimacy between the PRC and ROC. In the 1960s, China developed its nature protection policy in response to the challenge of the ROC government in Taiwan.

Occasionally, *Panda Nation* cites unreliable secondary sources. For example, citing Shuping Yao's article on the history of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS), the book states that "after the founding of the PRC, the new government saw science as a means of both liberating and strengthening China as a nation. From the first month of its rule, it actively organized such scientific institutions as the CAS, which governed six research institutions plus the Institute of History and languages" (p. 28). This is not the case. In 1950, when the PRC founded the CAS, only the Institute of Archaeology and the Third Institute of History were established. The Third Institute was developed out of the Teaching Unit of the North China People's Revolutionary University under the leadership of Marxist historian Fan Wenlan 范文瀾 and focused on modern Chinese history. The planned First Institute (focusing on ancient history) and Second Institute (focusing on medieval history) were founded later, in 1954.

Although there are some minor weaknesses, *Panda Nation* makes a crucial contribution to our understanding of science and the PRC nature conservation enterprise. Some of the book's ideas are inspiring and well worth pursuing further. While discussing the formation process of the nature conservation policy in the early years of the PRC, the author notes that PRC articulations of state-sponsored nature conservation were very similar to those in Progressive Era America, concluding that "Communist conservation and capitalist conservation shared the same basic rationale for protecting natural resources and employing scientific methods to do so. These parallels become more understandable in light of the fact that Zhu Kezhen and other contemporary leading scientists in China were educated in the United States in the early twentieth century" (pp. 39–40). In fact, many scientists and engineers, including Zhu Kezhen, were educated at Tsinghua and then moved to study in the United States in the 1910s and 1920s, leading many of them to accept Progressive Era ideas about social engineering.

Another interesting point made in *Panda Nation* is that during the Cultural Revolution conservation biology benefited from the giant panda's image as a national treasure. This can be understood in a broader context, noted by many scholars, in which the nationalist spirit of the 1960s also motivated many other scientific achievements in fields as diverse as rocket science, nuclear technology, biology, mathematics, and medicine (including the synthesis of crystalline bovine insulin in 1965 and the discovery of artemisinin, which won a Nobel Prize for Tu Youyou decades later).

Despite some minor shortcomings, this book is very welcome as a work of scholarship contributing to the study of the PRC. Its accessible style makes it an

excellent choice for undergraduate courses on the history of the PRC, science and society, environmental history, and the history of animals.

Huaiyu Chen

Huaiyu Chen is associate professor of religious studies at Arizona State University, specializing in Chinese religions and history.



Theodor Tudoroiu with Amanda R. Ramlogan. *The Myth of China's No Strings Attached Development Assistance: A Caribbean Case Study.*

Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019. vii, 225 pp. Hardcover \$95.00, ISBN 978-1-7936-0322-7.

Several scholars have enthusiastically defined China's emergence as an alternative donor as a "silent revolution" in the international development cooperation landscape, predominantly because Chinese development assistance lacks the political and economic conditionality that characterizes "traditional" donors' foreign aid. Due to its unconditional nature, they claim, Chinese development assistance offers an alternative to recipient countries, which is enabling them to avoid the pressure for economic and political reform from Western donors and, ultimately, empowers them to establish their own development agenda. Nevertheless, the idea that Chinese foreign aid to developing countries is totally unconditional is often assumed as an undisputed fact, and it is uncritically replicated in several influential works among the literature on "alternative" or "emerging" donors.

Is the often-quoted claim that China provides unconditional aid backed up by empirical data? Does it simply uncritically mirror official Chinese rhetoric? The book *The Myth of China's No Strings Attached Development Assistance* is written with the explicit intent of refuting the claim that Chinese development aid comes with "no strings attached," an important task that surprisingly few previous studies have undertaken. With this work, Dr. Tudoroiu aims at debunking the "myth" that Chinese foreign assistance comes with no conditions; furthermore, he intends to describe the type of conditionality that guides Chinese development aid allocation strategy, using Chinese aid to the Caribbean (and especially to Trinidad and Tobago) as a case study. The author develops the case study in support of the thesis that Chinese aid comes indeed with several well-defined political, economic, and social conditionalities. Using a constructivist theoretical approach, he arrives at the conclusion that China,