

**University Sponsorship Programme 2005-06:
Student's diary**

**Project : Giant Pandas – Enrichment items design
program**

Date : 7 to 19 January 2006

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7 Jan 2006 (Saturday)

As we had to bring the enrichment items to Wolong with us, our luggage was overweight. The plane took off at 10:10 am without delay, there were not many passengers on the same plane with us, maybe because Chengdu of Sichuan is not a very popular tourist attraction in this period of time of the year. I guess it's too cold. We arrived Chengdu airport at 13:20pm and met the driver from the Research and Conservation Centre, Mr Zhou, about 15 minutes later. Chengdu was not as cold as I've expected. On our way to Wolong, we stopped at 都江堰縣 as the driver had to have his lunch. While he was having his lunch, he advised Vivien and me to take photos under the statue of 李冰, which was a landmark of that district. Mr. Zhou told us that nothing would be available for us to buy at Wolong, so he suggested us to buy whatever we would need in the coming days. As we were quite well-prepared, there was not much we needed to buy except fruits. So he drove us to a market nearby and we bought some fruits, which I believe will be our only source of fruits in the coming 11 days. Scenery was good on our way; we could see high mountains and large rivers, one of which was the Min River. Yet the roads became more rugged and rough when we were closer to our destination. I remember we had to stop at one point and wait for about 5 – 10 minutes before we could continue our journey due to some blasting operation ahead. Mr. Zhou said that the roads to Wolong were not of very good condition as there was always risk of landslide during heavy rain.

We arrived the Panda Inn at about 18:00 pm. An official from the Wolong centre was already there waiting for us, he was 郭主任. We checked in, put our luggage inside our room and then went down to the restaurant to have our dinner. Food was not bad, at least much better than I've expected. After dinner, we went back to our room, unpacked some of our belongings and settled down. The inn room is pretty much similar to other hotel rooms, I am pleased that the air-conditioner actually works and there's hot water for us to take showers, despite that fact that we need to wait sometime before hot water really comes out.

8 Jan 06 (Sunday)

After breakfast we finally went to the China Conservation and Research Centre for Giant Panda (CCRCGP) which is very close to the inn. The size of the centre is smaller than I thought, yet many pandas live there. Some live in open enclosures and some live in rooms made of concrete and metal bars. We met



Mr. Huang, manager of the centre in the morning, he brought along his little daughter. We had a brief discussion with him in his office, he then led us to walk around the centre and introduced the names, age and sex of pandas to us. We also had the chance to visit baby pandas, which were about 6-months old. They live in the rooms behind the display rooms where their mothers stay. All babies are adorable creatures and baby pandas are of no exception. They were very curious where they saw us, it seemed that they wanted to climb pass the metal bars and touch us. We took loads of photos today. Weather is fine today and cold at the same time.

9 Jan 06 (Monday)

Six pandas from three age groups were selected as our subjects today. We were allowed to select from all pandas in the centre, according to Mr. Huang, except the panda mothers as they need to take care of their babies. So we chose No. 16 (female) and No. 19 (males), both of 1.5 years old, as they live in the same newly built enclosure, so that will make our observations easier. These two pandas become celebrities now as they were chosen as the candidates which will be sent to Taiwan. Notice boards introducing their names, characteristics etc. can now be found in the centre. Another pair of subjects we chose were Yuanguang (male) and Yingmei (female), both of 2.5 years old. Again they were chosen because they live in the same enclosure. Linlin (male, 8 years & 5 months old) and Yeye (female, 6 years & 4 months old) were chosen as the adult group representatives. They live in adjacent enclosures with similar environment.

We tried to differentiate between No. 16 and No. 19 as well as Yuanguang and Yingmei today. No. 16 and No.19 can be distinguished based on their characteristics. No. 16 is larger in size, walks faster and is more active while No. 19 has rounded face and shorter limbs, he looked cute and his movements are slower compared to his neighbor. However, we found it difficult to differentiate between Yuanguang and Yingmei. Mr. Huang introduced Mr. Wei Ming to us today, as Mr. Huang will not be in the centre tomorrow, Mr. Wei will help us carry out our experiment.

10 Jan 06 (Tuesday)

Today we carried out our experiment the first time in Wolong, all three enrichments were given to different groups of pandas. It seemed that the puzzle feeder was the most popular item. Well, this should be within our expectation, as food can always interest animals. In the morning, we went in the food preparation room to cut apples, pears, carrots and biscuits into small pieces and put them inside the puzzle feeder. I assumed that the pandas would be locked inside their small rooms adjacent to their enclosures before we went in to put up the items, yet Mr. Wei said as No. 16 and 19 were small, so we could go straight inside without locking them up. I liked these two little pandas, but I was still



afraid that they would scratch me with their finger nails, as I was told my Paul (Animal behaviour & enrichment manager of Ocean Park) that he was scratched by pandas and his leg was hurt even with two layers of trousers on. So I took picture for Vivien outside the enclosure while she and Mr. Wei hung the puzzle feeder on the tree trunk. Pandas' responses to the item was quite good, they smelled and touched it gently at the beginning, then pushed it harder after realizing that food would come out from the item. They manipulated the item with their paws, bit it, lied down and held the item with their 4 limbs.

At about 10:30, the second session of our experiment began. The sound item was put in the living area of Yingmei and Yuanguan. Yuanguan was interested in the item, but Yingmei just concentrated in eating her bamboo. There was one time that she wanted to play with the item, but Yuanguan pushed her away.

In the afternoon, Vivien and I had to work separately as Yeye and Linlin live in separate areas. I was responsible for observing the behaviour of Yeye, she did not show much interest to the sack bag.

We needed to bother Mr. Wei every time we had to put the items in and take them out before and after each experiment. He was very helpful.

11 Jan 06 (Wednesday)

Same as yesterday, we carried out four sessions of experiment. No. 16 & 19 were very active, they fought for the sack bag which was put inside their enclosure in the morning. Yingmei appeared to be very quiet, she did not show much interest in the items, instead, she just concentrated eating her bamboo or food coming out from the puzzle feeder. She fought with Yuanguan several times, I had the impression that these two pandas did not live together very harmoniously, Yuanguan liked to bully Yingmei sometimes.

It's cold today. The adhesive heat pat did not work very well under such cold conditions.

12 Jan 06 (Thursday)

Highlight of the day is our visit to a pair of baby pandas. Mr. Wei told us yesterday that they (keepers) fed the baby pandas with milk at 3 pm everyday, so he suggested that we could carry out our experiment a little bit earlier this afternoon, then he could bought us to watch the babies. He thought it would be a memorable experience for us to visit the babies. So today we started our 3rd session of experiment earlier, went with him to the panda hospital where 2 panda babies and their mother lived. He put the bowl of milk on the floor of a room; the 2 twins then squeezed their bodies through a hole and went to the front part of the room. Vivien and I watched them drinking milk, they were very cute! Mr. Wei then held up one baby and told us that we could do the same and take photos with panda babies in our hands. Yet the two of us looked clumsy when we held them up, it's because they struggled when we held them in our hands, we were afraid that we would hurt them if we held them too tight. They were like puppies smelling our legs when they were around us; one panda even left some milk on my coat as his lips were surrounded with milk. We also had the chance to touch them; their hair was not as smooth as it looked like, it was quite hard actually. Today's a memorable day! We two were very delighted to have such close contact with the panda babies.

13 Jan 06 (Friday)

It started snowing this morning! This was my first time to see snowing in my life! Small snows were falling like rainfall at the beginning, and then it became heavier and bigger, which could be captured under digital cameras. Of course we seized the chance to take photos. Vivien told me to look at the shapes of snowflakes. Everywhere was covered by a thin layer of white snow. But the snow did not last long, it stopped in about an hour, then it melt and the floor became a little slippery. Several foreign visitors went in the enclosure of Yingmei to take pictures with her, she was very quiet and did not move, keeper gave her some fruits during photo-taking. The visitors looked very excited and happy when they got the chance to touch and stand near Yingmei, they kept smiling and calling Yingmei 'good boy', the keeper then corrected them that Yingmei was actually a 'girl'.

14 Jan 06 (Saturday)

After I got up this morning, I drew apart the curtains and found that Wolong was covered by a layer of white snow. Obviously it was snowing last night. The scenery was beautiful! The pandas looked more excited than we were, all of them behaved very actively, it was apparent that they liked snowing. They rolled over the snow, ran quickly, slid down the slopes, played with one another joyfully. Again, the snow melt and the floor became slippery when the sun became brighter in the afternoon. My nose started to get a little unwell in these two days, probably because it could not adapt to the cold weather, luckily I think it's just allergy.

15 Jan 06 (Sunday)

A thicker layer of snow could be seen everywhere in the morning, but it melt after we finished our lunch. Our schedule is pretty much the same everyday, observing the pandas' response to our enrichment items and taking photos or videos. We had our breakfasts, lunches and dinners at the same restaurant inside the inn. But today we finally got out of the reserve and Panda Inn. Timothy and the reporters from Hong Kong arrived Wolong



this evening, so we were asked to go to the hotel where they stayed for dinner. After finishing our last session of experiment, we got on the staff car, which was overcrowded with about 15 people in a van, and then headed to the hotel. We then met Timothy at the hotel lobby, and were introduced to Shirley (reporter of SCMP), Samantha (photographer of SCMP) and Shelly (reporter of the Sun). We had dinner at the hotel's restaurant. This was the first time we ate outside Panda Inn since we went to Sichuan. Knew something more

about the newspaper industry in Hong Kong during our chatting.

16 Jan 06 (Monday)

Our schedule today was slightly different from the previous days as we needed to give the reporters from Hong Kong a mini tour of the centre and demonstrate to them what we do everyday. After the demonstration, we carried on our experiment. We had lunch together at the restaurant of the Panda Inn, after which they went up to our room for some rest as we all needed to wait for sometime before our afternoon activities began. Our room was the best place to stay at that time, as it was too cold outside. They seemed to admire the air-conditioning in our room. We played cards and chatted.

Yingmei was moved to a new living place yesterday as new pandas would be coming to Wolong Centre in the coming days, according to the keepers. A crew from the CCTV was in the Centre and did some video shooting.

17 Jan 06 (Tuesday)

We could not put the enrichment item in Yeye's living place today. It's because another panda was put in the same enclosure, yet this new resident did not get on very well with Yeye. They could not be locked in their room at the same time, so we could not place our items in their living area. Today afternoon, we were called to go to the Nursery as the reporters wanted to take some photos for us and the pandas. We were so happy that we got the chance to come close to four 2.5 years old pandas and touch them while we took photos with them. We were asked to wear some plastic bags to cover our shoes, probably because the staff wanted to prevent us from contaminating the playing grounds of the pandas. Had the chance to see some photos taken by Samantha today, they were all very nice. Afterall, photos taken by a professional were definitely far better than ours. We went to the souvenir shops to buy some panda gifts for our friends and family in Hong Kong. In case we forgot something today, we will still have chance to buy more tomorrow. Tonight we had dinner at the Panda Inn again, had a nice chat with Tim, Shirley, Samantha, Shelly and Vivien. I think it was quite a unique opportunity to sit together with people whom I am not very familiar with and chitchat. I did enjoy our conversations; we left the restaurant when the waitress told us that it was time for them to close.

18 Jan 06 (Wednesday)

Tim and the reporters left today. We continued with our last day of experiment at Wolong Centre. I guess I will miss the pandas when we are back to Hong Kong. We seized the chance to take photos with the staff here as well as a photographer from Taiwan (who we met almost everyday) today. Tonight, we invited Mr. Wei and his co-worker Mr. He to have dinner with us, we were really thankful for their help during our stay in the past 10 days. I know we've bother them a lot, especially Mr. Wei. Two pandas from a zoo in Beijing arrived during dinner time today; the staff of the centre were busy settling them down. Vivien and I were also busy packing in the evening.

19 Jan 06 (Thursday)

We woke up early this morning, finally had to leave the place where we have stayed for 12 days. Had mixed feeling, happy to go home but at the same time think I'll miss everything here. At the Chengdu airport, we met 劉青雲 after checking in. He looked quite slim and very dark. He was in the same flight with us traveling back to Hong Kong. I am finally back to Hong Kong today, home sweet home! This Wolong trip is definitely a valuable and memorable experience to me. We got to get into close contact with many

pandas, had the chance to spend long hours observing their behaviours, knew more about the Wolong Centre and most importantly, we were able to enrich the lives of pandas and carry out conservational work. It's a meaningful journey!