

Fond farewell as first France-born panda heads to China

July 25 2023, by Maxime MAMET



There are about 600 in captivity in panda centers, zoos and wildlife parks around the world.

The first giant panda to have been born in France received an emotional send-off on Tuesday as he left his French zoo ahead of the long haul

flight back to his ancestral China.

Yuan Meng, who was born in 2017 in the Beauval zoo in the Loire region of France, was cheered by visitors and zoo staff as he was driven under police escort to Charles de Gaulle airport for a 12-hour Air China flight to the Chinese city of Chengdu which took off in the early evening, an AFP reporter saw.

Trained for several days to get ready comfortably for the trip, the son of Yuan Zi and Huan Huan—the first pandas loaned to France by the Chinese authorities in 2012—did not show much hesitation in climbing into his special cage filled with bamboo for his trip.

"Everything went well. He said goodbye to his parents and his sisters, with tears in the eyes of his keepers," said Rodolphe Delord, head of the zoo.

"He can now continue to live his good life. It's inevitably a moment of emotion, but all our animals born here are forced to leave one day. We're used to that," he added.

The panda was given a final farewell on the tarmac by French first lady Brigitte Macron before being loaded onto the cargo plane.

Macron knelt in front of the clear panes of the cage to say goodbye to the panda, who initially appeared more interested in sleeping but then languidly raised his head to acknowledge the presence of the French first lady, television images showed.



The bear was given a rousing send-off.

'For his own good'

Hundreds of fans of the black and white bear earlier braved morning rain outside Beauval zoo to bid farewell.

"It's still sad, we got attached to the pandas. But we know he'll be better off there, for the good of the species," said Caroline Bernard.

Her daughter Lilou, nine, was less sanguine.

"I cried, I am sad he is leaving. But I am trying to tell myself that he will

be better off there. It's for his own good," she said, her eyes red with tears.

In Chengdu, the panda will be transferred to a panda reproduction center, with the job of helping to keep his species in existence.

China has long deployed so-called panda diplomacy with friends and even foes ranging from the United States to Taiwan, gifting the animals to various countries, often to further its foreign policy aims.



The bear happily climbed into its cage.



Yuan Meng was born in 2017 in the Beauval zoo in the Loire region of France.

Beijing only loans pandas to foreign zoos, which must usually return any offspring within a few years of their birth to join the country's breeding program.

There are an estimated 1,860 giant pandas left in the wild, mainly in bamboo forests in the mountains of China, according to environmental group WWF.

There are about 600 in captivity in panda centers, zoos and wildlife parks around the world.

© 2023 AFP

Citation: Fond farewell as first France-born panda heads to China (2023, July 25) retrieved 29 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-07-fond-farewell-france-born-panda-china.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.