

Season 8, Episode 1 The Sex Lives of Giant Pandas Final Transcription

Lizzie Peabody: This is Sidedoor, a podcast from the Smithsonian with support from PRX. I'm Lizzie Peabody.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: One evening in the early 1970s, this presidential message interrupted primetime television.

Speaker 2: Now an address by the President of the United States, speaking live from Washington.

Lizzie Peabody: President Richard Nixon stepped up to a podium with a blue curtain behind him, and from there, he made an announcement that shocked Americans across the country. No, it was not that he was resigning from office, but it may have been just as big, possibly bigger.

Richard Nixon: I have requested this television time tonight to announce a major development in our efforts to build a lasting peace in the world.

Lizzie Peabody: Nixon announced that he had accepted an invitation to go to China and meet with Chairman, Mao Zedong. A Washington Post reporter wrote that, "If Mr. Nixon revealed he was going to the moon, he could not have flabbergasted his audience anymore."

Richard Nixon: The meeting between the leaders of China and the United States is to seek the normalization of relations between the two countries.

Lizzie Peabody: The U.S. and China had been fierce rivals since the late 1940s, fighting on opposite sides of the Korean and Vietnam Wars. The U.S. saw Chinese communism as a threat to the very existence of democracy.

Richard Nixon: We seek friendly relations with all nations. It is in this spirit that I will undertake what I deeply hope will become a journey for peace. Peace not just for our generation, but for future generations on this earth we share together. Thank you and goodnight.

Lizzie Peabody: In 1972, Richard Nixon and his wife, Pat, went to China. They met dignitaries, went to the ballet, and even visited The Great Wall.

Richard Nixon: You would have to conclude that this is a great wall and that it had to be built by a great people.

Lizzie Peabody: At the end of the week-long trip, Nixon signed an agreement to reopen diplomatic ties between the United States and China. It made headlines around the world.
Richard Nixon: Generations in the years ahead will look back and thank us for this meeting that we have held in this past week.

Lizzie Peabody: He was right, but not for the reason he thought. Because while Richard Nixon was shaking hands with dignitaries, the First Lady was securing her own kind of victory, and it's an achievement she stumbled on by accident. One night at dinner, Pat Nixon was sitting next to Chinese Premiere, Zhou Enlai. The premiere is essentially the prime minister, by the way. Zhou had set a small pack of cigarettes down on the table. The logo on the cigarette tin was two black and white bears. Pat said something like, "Well, aren't they cute?"

Pat Nixon: That is beautiful.

Lizzie Peabody: She picked up the tin, examined the cuddly looking animals on it and said, "I love them." Zhou looked at her and he said, "I'll give you some." Stunned, she looked back at the premiere, "What? Cigarettes?" "No," he said.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: "Pandas." Zhou was dead serious. He gave Pat Nixon two young pandas to take back to the American people. They would be the country's first pair of official pandas. The Nixon's could think of no better place for them to live than the Smithsonian's National Zoo in Washington, D.C.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: With a male and female panda, and the country's best vets at their disposal, the hope was that the national zoo could turn two pandas into a panda family. Not only that, but whatever they learned about how pandas reproduce could be used to repopulate these endangered animals in the wild. Zoo vets were up for the challenge, but they never would've guessed just how hard it would be to actually get pandas to mate.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: This time on Sidedoor, we are bringing you some sex ed, panda style. We explore why it is so hard to make baby pandas and how researchers think they have finally nailed it. That's coming up, after the break.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: On a warm spring day in 1972, the first pandas arrived at the Smithsonian's National Zoo, a female called Ling-Ling and a male called Hsing-Hsing. Pat Nixon was there to welcome them.

Pat Nixon: I am pleased to be here and accept the precious gift of the panda. I think pandemonium is going to break out right here at the zoo. Thank you-

Lizzie Peabody: Pandemonium was right. More than 20,000 people came to see the pandas on the first weekend. A million came the first year. Everyone wanted to see these pandas.

Stephen Powers: Going into it, there was an excitement about seeing this animal for the first time, especially outside of China.

Lizzie Peabody: This is Stephen Powers. He was one of those early visitors in 1972. At the time, he was in second grade on a field trip with his class.

Stephen Powers: It was something unique and it felt like you were one of the first.

Lizzie Peabody: Now, Stephen didn't realize it at the time, but this encounter as an eight-year-old created a lifelong love of giant pandas, and he is not alone. Lots of people love pandas. This is where I just want to take a quick moment and say, I am not one of those people. I mean, pandas are fine, but they're just bears, right? I mean, no other bear has a cult following like the panda. What is all the fuss about?

[MUSIC]

Stephen Powers: I think it's mostly because the colors and the marking, the fact that they're black and white and their arms are different and it seems like they want to hug more. It gives that kind of a feeling. When they walk, they almost roll...

Lizzie Peabody: Stephen's onto something. Turns out humans are hardwired to think pandas are adorable. There's science to back it up. An Australian zoologist actually won a Nobel Prize in the '70s for explaining this phenomenon. The big black patches on a panda's face gives them the appearance of having big eyes like a human baby. It's the same with their round faces, their little snub noses and their large heads. Our subconscious brain sees a panda and thinks, "Cute baby." There's even a term for this. It's called "baby schema" and it's an evolutionary adaptation because if something is cute, you want to nurture it, not hurt it. To put it in Darwinian terms, "Survival of the cutest."

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: This cuteness wasn't helping wild pandas back in the early 1970s when Ling-Ling and Hsing-Hsing arrived at the zoo. Pandas were nearly extinct. There were only about a thousand left in the wild, and roughly 35 in captivity. If all the pandas in the world back then were people, they would've fit on a single subway train.

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Lisa Stevens: The pressure to breed Ling-Ling and Hsing-Hsing certainly was enormous. They were the only giant pandas in the United States.

Lizzie Peabody: This is Lisa Stevens, also known as the "Panda Lady". She was the curator of giant pandas at the National Zoo from 1987 to 2011.

Lisa Stevens: I have to say that breeding becomes almost the solitary goal of maintaining pandas in zoo settings.

Lizzie Peabody: Americans were super excited to have pandas at one of their zoos, but behind the scenes, vets at the National Zoo were frantically trying to figure out how to help the pandas make babies. And boy, did they need help.

Richard Nixon: The problem, however, with pandas, is that they don't know how to mate.

Lizzie Peabody: Here to clarify the situation, President Richard Nixon, again. This is from a phone call with a reporter right before the pandas arrived in 1972.

Richard Nixon: The only way they learn how is to watch other pandas mate, you see? They're keeping them there a little while, these are younger ones to sort of learn how it's done.

Noyes: Learn the rope.

Richard Nixon: Now if they don't learn it, they'll get over here, nothing will happen. I just thought you should have your best reporter out there to see whether these have learned. Now that I've given you the story of pandas, let me let you get back to your more serious-

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: Ling-Ling and Hsing-Hsing needed a sex primer before they came to the U.S. And if you're like me, you're probably wondering, "Why can't these pandas figure this out? They're animals. This should be instinctual, right?" Turns out, it wasn't. And nobody in 1972 really knew why.

Lisa Stevens: A lot of our knowledge was very basic. We had a basic understanding of the animals in their behavioral biology, but there was so much that we still had to learn.

Lizzie Peabody: Even in China, vets were struggling to breed pandas in captivity and researchers couldn't observe what they did in the wild because there were so few of them. They lived in remote mountainous regions. Smithsonian vets started filming Ling-Ling and Hsing-Hsing to

learn as much as possible. This is a research film we found in the Smithsonian Institution archives.

Devra Kleiman: The purpose of this film is to present the social and sexual development of the pair of giant pandas received by the United States National Zoological Park-

Lizzie Peabody: That voice is Devra Kleiman. She was a research biologist at the National Zoo at the time. Just a warning, the rest of this episode gets into some fairly explicit, those scientifically necessary detail, about how panda sex works.

Devra Kleiman: Copulation lasts for one to three minutes and occurs fewer than four times during the female's two to three day heat period.

Lizzie Peabody: One of the first things you need to know about pandas is that there's really only about a two-day window each year where a female panda can get pregnant. This is called estrous. It's when her estrogen levels spike and she ovulates. That's when the egg is ready to be fertilized. The problem is that you can't see these changes from outside a panda's body. So how do you figure out which two, out of the 365 days a year, a panda is in heat? Well, through careful observation, Kleiman found that Ling-Ling would start to act a little odd each spring, right before she went into estrous.

Devra Kleiman: A somewhat peculiar behavior indicating the onset of heat in the female is backwards walking, accompanied by the bleating vocalization. This behavior has been common since Ling-Ling's first heat in 1973. We consider it a behavioral indicator of approaching estrous. Lizzie Peabody: Ling-Ling would bleat like a goat or even chirp. If you've ever seen pandas, they usually kind of lays around and chow down on bamboo all day. But right before Ling-Ling went into heat, both pandas would start zooming around their enclosures.

Lisa Stevens: It's almost as though you've pushed the fast forward button on them. They become these active, pacing, vocalizing, maniacs, for lack of a better word.

Lizzie Peabody: And while Ling-Ling bleated, Hsing-Hsing would bark, like a poodle... Ah, the love language of pandas. When the National Zoo vets saw these behaviors and heard these sounds, they'd put Ling-Ling and Hsing-Hsing together in a room, and hopefully they'd get down to business...

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: If you catch my drift. Ling-Ling would crouch down on all fours. Hsing-Hsing would come up behind, stand on his back two feet, place a careful paw on her back and seal the deal. Well, he'd try to seal the deal.

Devra Kleiman: The males mounts were improperly oriented and often directed towards Ling-Ling's side. No pelvic thrusting was seen.

Lizzie Peabody: He really was not very good at it. As the pandas tried and failed to mate, zookeepers watched in helpless frustration, there was really nothing they could do. Hsing-Hsing really only had a few minutes before Ling-Ling would get frustrated and basically tell him to scram.

Lisa Stevens: Then you hear barking and growling if things have deteriorated and it's done, and it's time to chase the male off.

Lizzie Peabody: So, it's like, "Out of here now."

Lisa Stevens: Yeah. I'm done.

Lizzie Peabody: As vets grew more frustrated, so did the panda fans who were desperate to see Ling-Ling give birth to the cutest form of the cutest bear... a baby panda.

Lisa Stevens: Oh my goodness. People were crazy for her to get pregnant. We had groupies, but there were people that followed our pandas by coming here and parking themselves in front of the enclosure. If they got wind that the pandas were in heat, they didn't want to leave the front of the enclosure or the zoo, when the zoo closed.

Lizzie Peabody: You mean, they would just like-

Lisa Stevens: They'd park themselves there.

Lizzie Peabody: It was like a sit-in?

Lisa Stevens: Yeah, they wanted to see the pandas copulate, and they wanted to confirm themselves that there had been successful mating.

Lizzie Peabody: Panda pregnancy watch made national headlines each spring, as panda fans, like Stephen Powers, held their breath hoping Ling-Ling would get pregnant.

Stephen Powers: Well, it was exciting. Every year you would think, "Okay, this is the year. They're going to get pregnant. We've got two pandas, a male and a female." And that excitement turned to disappointment over the years and the years and years of, "Well, they can't."

Lizzie Peabody: The 1970s turned into the '80s and still no baby pandas. Richard Nixon resigned in disgrace. Jimmy Carter came and went. Reagan was nearly done with his second term in office when things started to get desperate. The pandas were nearing the end of their reproductive lifespan.

Lisa Stevens: At that time, our reproductive staff and the animal management staff decided we needed a new approach.

Lizzie Peabody: Back in the 1970s, most researchers thought pandas lived alone in the wild. Ling-Ling and Hsing-Hsing were housed separately at the zoo. But by 1987, researchers learned that pandas could live together. Zoo vets started letting Ling-Ling and Hsing-Hsing spend time together outside of mating season. They thought that if Ling-Ling and Hsing-Hsing spent more time together, they might form more of a connection.

Lisa Stevens: And our new approach seemed to work because in 1987, Ling-Ling and Hsing-Hsing copulated successfully, more than once, and we had a panda birth.

Lizzie Peabody: Twins, in fact. The, "pandaverse" exploded with excitement.

Lisa Stevens: I can almost tear up now talking about it because it made a lot of people happy. We received letters, we received gifts. People would send the panda staff cookies, and coffee, and-

Lizzie Peabody: One of the twins died right after it was born. But the other was healthy. Vets watched on camera as Ling-Ling's maternal instincts kicked in and she cradled her new baby. But after four days, the cub got an infection and died.

Stephen Powers: When they did not survive, that was crushing because that seemed like we're that close to the goal line and not make it. That was almost the giving up of hope. I think from that point on, I felt like it's just not going to happen with Hsing-Hsing and Ling-Ling.

Lisa Stevens: I mean, it was the lowest of lows. Everyone was sending us condolences. Everyone was very sad for us. I mean, we were mourning. It was very, very sad.

Lizzie Peabody: Ling-Ling got pregnant five times over the course of her life, but none of her cubs survived. And in 1992, she died of heart failure.

Lisa Stevens: She died quickly, suddenly, doing what she liked to do best outside of the breeding season, which is lay on her platform in the sun and sleep.

Lizzie Peabody: Hsing-Hsing lived alone for the next seven years until he died of kidney failure in 1999. The National Zoo was pandaless for the first time in 25 years. This left people like Stephen Powers wondering, "What would happen next?"

Stephen Powers: Would we get more? It took a president to bring these pandas to us. How would this now play out?

Lizzie Peabody: That's coming up, after the break.

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[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: It's the year 2000. Y2K. Blockbuster video is crushing it. People are playing Snake on their Nokia phones and TLC's song, No Scrubs, is at the top of the music charts.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: That fall, President Clinton signed a bill into law that made China a major trading partner with the U.S. bringing Washington and Beijing even closer together. China was happy to send two more pandas to the National Zoo and the person in charge of bringing this precious cargo back to the U.S... Lisa Stevens, the National Zoo's "Panda lady".

Lisa Stevens: The pandas were in crates at the front of the plane where they would have the smoothest ride. It was a big cargo airplane, and we had it all to ourselves. I remember when we were flying that there was a lot of chatter back and forth between the pilots of the other planes in the air.

Speaker 10: This is Panda One. Panda One, I got pandas here. Do you read me?

Speaker 11: We read you Panda One. Making way for pandas.

Lisa Stevens: They were giving us the preferred fly pass.

Lizzie Peabody: Oh my god. Aboard Panda One was Mei Xiang and Tian Tian. Mei Xiang, the girl, was two. And Tian Tian, the boy, was three. When they landed, they were greeted with a media frenzy fit for royalty.

Lisa Stevens: There was a motorcade from Dallas Airport to the zoo with cars and helicopters. The whole bit. The pandas were blissfully unaware of that.

Lizzie Peabody: CBS News declared that, "Washington's newest power couple had just arrived." And Stephen Powers, panda fan, was there to greet them.

Stephen Powers: It was like seeing them all anew again. And to have children of my own so young, I knew that it was something that I wanted to do with them.

Lizzie Peabody: It felt like a new beginning, it sounds like?

Stephen Powers: Absolutely.

Lizzie Peabody: This new beginning was a reset for the zoo's panda breeding program. Hopes were high that Mei Xiang and Tian Tian could start a panda fam. It had been nearly a decade since Ling-Ling died. Technology had evolved, vets knew more about panda breeding, and the zoo had another new edition.

Pierre Comizzoli: My name is Pierre Comizzoli. I am a research veterinarian at the National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute. I've been working here for 20 years.

Lizzie Peabody: When you were a kid, did you ever think like, "I would like to be a panda sex expert?"

Pierre Comizzoli: Absolutely not.

Lizzie Peabody: Just like a panda tumbles down a hill, Pierre kind of fell into his role as a panda reproductive specialist. His expertise was originally in artificial insemination of cats.

Pierre Comizzoli: I was working full-time on that. But of course, once a year, we had the possibility to work on the giant panda. I can tell you that everything stopped for at least two or three weeks when we knew that the giant panda breeding season was starting. It was all hands-on-deck.

Lizzie Peabody: Pierre's expertise in artificial insemination came in handy with Mei Xiang and Tian Tian because they were even worse at having sex than their predecessors. The pandas tried to mate naturally in 2003 and 2004, but they were not even close.

Pierre Comizzoli: The female was not positioning herself properly. And because also the male didn't know exactly how to move her, and he was kind of a little bit clumsy himself-

Lizzie Peabody: Oh no-

Pierre Comizzoli: ... you had this kind of a frustration building up.

Lizzie Peabody: Once they realized natural mating was likely to be a dead end, Pierre and the National Zoo vets came up with a new strategy. In the next breeding season, the spring of 2005, they had a plan B ready to go... Artificial insemination. But like anything with panda breeding, it's always harder than it seems.

Pierre Comizzoli: We always like to joke about the fact that wildlife reproduction in general, not only giant panda reproduction, it's not rocket science. It's much more complicated because it's completely unpredictable. Yes. The procedure itself is not that hard. What's always been the hardest part is really to know when is the right time.

Lizzie Peabody: Remember how a female panda is only in heat for two days out of the year? Well, when it comes to artificial insemination, that window of opportunity narrows to just 12 hours... half a day. So, scientists have to get the timing just right, because...

Pierre Comizzoli: If we go too early and she hasn't ovulated, then the sedation is going to block, it's going to inhibit the ovulation.

Lizzie Peabody: If they wait too long to start the insemination process, they might miss the egg drop.

Pierre Comizzoli: The egg cannot sit forever like that in the reproductive tract waiting for the sperm.

Lizzie Peabody: So, timing is everything. To figure out when ovulation is about to happen, Pierre needed panda pee because Mei Xiang's pee held the answer to how much estrogen was in her body. And just like humans, a panda's estrogen level spikes when she's ovulating.

Pierre Comizzoli: Every hour we get a new sample, we look at the samples, it keeps climbing, keeps climbing, and all the time we say, "Okay, next time it's going to drop."

Lizzie Peabody: In the spring of 2005, as soon as Mei Xiang started walking backwards and bleating, Pierre and the rest of the team started sleeping at the zoo, feeding Mei Xiang sugary water so she'd pee more, then slurping it up with a syringe and testing it, waiting for Mei Xiang's estrogen level to peak. And when it finally did, they sprung into action. First things first, the vets anesthetized both pandas. Then they had to get some semen from Tian Tian, using a method called electroejaculation.

Pierre Comizzoli: This is something that's also used in humans for men who are paralyzed, for example, but they still want to have babies. You can still really collect semen by electrical stimulation. We use the exact same techniques for the giant panda.

Lizzie Peabody: Pierre's team took that fresh semen and inserted it into Mei Xiang's uterus using a long plastic tube. The whole process only took a couple of minutes, and that was that. The hardest part of the whole process might be the waiting that follows, because there's really no way to know if a panda is pregnant. You can't tell through their hormone levels. And the embryos are too small to see through an ultrasound until the last couple of weeks of pregnancy. In the meantime, everyone was anxious to find out if the artificial insemination worked.

Pierre Comizzoli: All the time, the newspapers... and they were asking us, "So is she pregnant this year? Or..." "We don't know."

Lizzie Peabody: Then after nearly four months, vets spotted a little wiggle in Mei Xiang's ultrasound. She was pregnant.

Stephen Powers: When Mei Xiang and Tian Tian got pregnant, that was really exciting.

Lizzie Peabody: This is Stephen Powers again.

Stephen Powers: There were people, others like me, that were excited about that and wondering, "Would it be a boy? Would it be a girl? And when was it coming?"

Lizzie Peabody: The "pandaverse" was abuzz waiting for this new cub. Then on July 5th, 2005, at 3:41 AM, Mei Xiang gave birth live on the Panda Cam. And even if you were awake and watching at that hour, if you blinked, you might have missed it.

Pierre Comizzoli: The cub shoots out the vulva. Then all of a sudden the female gets all agitated. You hear this very loud squeaking from the... And then, okay, so we know, okay, so it's born...

Lizzie Peabody: Lisa Stephens had been down this road before though. She was excited, but also a little nervous.

Lisa Stevens: Because here I am, someone who lived through the last pregnancies of Ling-Ling where the ultimate pinnacle of a thrill was followed by just the worst, in terms of loss of cubs. I was excited and thrilled, but I was extremely frightened at the same time.

Lizzie Peabody: But the cub survived. Three days, 10 days, 30 days. The furless, rat-looking little infant grew into a fuzzy, cuddly little baby panda. And that fall, visitors finally got to visit the new cub who was named Tai Shan. And of course, Stephen Powers was one of the first in line.

Stephen Powers: I got in the second day. We got in first thing in the morning. It was the first visit of the day. We have a video of my two children kind of jumping up and down because we were getting them all pumped up to go in there. They're all smiling and it's on VHS because back then it was... that's how you recorded.

Lizzie Peabody: That means you brought that pretty heavy shoulder camera to the zoo?

Stephen Powers: That's correct. Yep. Everyone had those. It wasn't the smartphone days.

Lizzie Peabody: 33 years after pandas arrived at the Smithsonian's National Zoo, they finally had a baby that survived. But the excitement of Tai Shan's birth was bittersweet. The first pandas at the zoo, Ling-Ling and Hsing-Hsing were gifts from China. But because of new conservation laws, Mei Xiang and Tian Tian were loaned to the zoo. That meant, all their babies had to go back to China to help with wild panda repopulation. Tai Shan went back to China in 2009 when he was four years old. Mei Xiang had two more cubs after that. Then in 2020, when most people thought she was too old to have another baby, she had one more... Xiao Qi Ji, also known as the miracle cub.

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Stephen Powers: It felt like, "Okay, even though the babies are going to be going back to China, there'll be another one, and then another one, and another one." Then, when the Miracle Baby was born, that was almost like, "Wow, they really got it down now."

Lizzie Peabody: Vets at the National Zoo and in China have finally figured out how to help pandas make babies. 50 years ago, when Ling-Ling and Hsing-Hsing came to America, there were 35 pandas in captivity. Now, there are more than 600. Chinese vets deserve most of the credit here. But the National Zoos Breeding Program in panda research has helped China nearly double the wild panda population as well. Would you call this a conservation success story?

Pierre Comizzoli: Yeah, it's a huge success. What I like also in the story of the giant panda is that it's been an international collaboration. People in China have welcomed a lot of experts from the United States, from Europe, from other Asian countries, and everybody has worked together to reach that goal. I think that's a very beautiful story for that, because if you really want to save a species, it's possible. Of course, it involves a lot of resources, expertise, and financial support... but it's possible.

Lizzie Peabody: That collaboration goes back to Richard and Pat Nixon's visit to China in the winter of 1972. Two countries at odds came together. The pandas at the National Zoo are a reminder of that moment, the generosity that's possible when differences are set aside, and the problems that can be solved when people work together.

Lisa Stevens: I see giant pandas as a bridge, and we live in times now where there are very few bridges.

Lizzie Peabody: Mei Xiang, Tian Tian and their baby, Xiau Qi Ji, are scheduled to return to China next year, when their loan ends. That will leave the zoo pandaless again. It's unclear if China will loan the Smithsonian's National Zoo another pair of pandas. But one thing is, sure...

Stephen Powers: I'll be there to greet them. And who knows, maybe I'll have a grandchild as well by then, that will join in for the next generation.

Lizzie Peabody: Oh man, Stephen, you just gave me goosebumps.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: You've been listening to Sidedoor, a podcast from the Smithsonian with support from PRX.

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Lizzie Peabody: This year marks 50 years of Pandamonium at the National Zoo, and there are plenty of ways to celebrate. To learn more, and to see some cool photos from our reporting, check out our newsletter. You can subscribe at si.edu/Sidedoor.

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Lizzie Peabody: For help with this episode, we want to thank Lisa Stevens, Pierre Comizzoli, Stephen Powers, Pamela Baker-Mason, Annalisa Meyer, and Jennifer Zoon. We also want to thank the Richard Nixon Foundation for that archival audio of our 37th president.

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Lizzie Peabody: Our podcast team is James Morrison, Nathalie Boyd, Ann Conanan, Caitlin Shaffer, Tami O'Neill, Jess Sadeq, Lara Koch, and Sharon Bryant. Episode Artwork is by Dave Leonard. Extra support comes from Jason and Genevieve at PRX. Our show is mixed by Tarek Fouda. Our theme song and episode music are by Breakmaster Cylinder.

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Lizzie Peabody: If you want to sponsor our show, please email: sponsorship@prx.org. To keep up with the Sidedoor team, you can find us on social media @SidedoorPod, on Twitter, and Instagram. Or, you can email us your suggestions or show ideas at Sidedoor@si.edu.

[MUSIC]

Lizzie Peabody: I'm your host, Lizzie Peabody. Thanks for listening.

[MUSIC]

Stephen Powers: Back to President Nixon, the original trade... We gave China a pair of musk oxen-

Lizzie Peabody: That doesn't seem like a fair trade.

Stephen Powers: Well, what made it even less fair was the musk oxen-

Lizzie Peabody: It's hard to say.

Stephen Powers: It is hard to say. Passed away, right away. We did not give them another pair. China kind of got the short end of the stick in all of this.

Lizzie Peabody: Or the bamboo.

Stephen Powers: Or the bamboo...