

# Disneynature's *Born in China*

Director: Lu Chuan

Producers: Roy Conli, Brian Leith, Phil Chapman

## Goals for this lesson

1. Help students recognize and understand the wild animals (as well as endangered species) native to China that appear in the movie (see Part 1: Animal Index)
2. Help students understand the main storyline of the film
3. Help students understand key vocabulary and narration
4. Help students understand aspects of Chinese culture found within the film

## In this document

Words **highlighted in yellow** are from the science vocabulary words found in Part 2.

Grey highlights indicate key vocabulary words. [PLEASE SEE CHINESE VERSION]

**Part 1: Featured Animals**

<p><b>Snow Leopard</b></p>	
<p><b>Name</b></p>	<p>Dawa</p>
<p><b>Habitat</b></p>	<p>Qinghai highlands – she is the ruler of the Qinghai highlands. Elevation: over 4000 m</p>
<p><b>Climate</b></p>	<p>Extreme cold – most mammals are unable survive in this climate</p>
<p><b>Physical Characteristics</b></p>	<p>Long and slender tail – maintains balance. Grey spots – Natural camouflage for mountain cliffs</p>
<p><b>Behavioral Characteristics</b></p>	<p>Top of the food chain Adult snow leopards are solitary, so Da Wa must feed and care for her children all by herself Da Wa loves to sit and watch her cubs climb and play</p>
<p><b>Family Members</b></p>	<p>Two cubs</p>

<b>Golden Snub-Nosed Monkey</b>	
<b>Name</b>	Tao Tao
<b>Age</b>	2 Years
<b>Habitat</b>	In the Sichuan High Valley Gorge at an elevation of 1500-3300 m
<b>Appearance and personality characteristics</b>	Good-looking, martial arts master, troublemaker
<b>Behavioral characteristics</b>	In monkey troupes, there is typically only one father and multiple mothers. The mothers help each other to take care of the children.
<b>Family members</b>	Father, mother, and little sister

<p><b>Giant Panda</b></p>	
<p><b>Name</b></p>	<p>Ya Ya</p>
<p><b>Age</b></p>	<p>2 years</p>
<p><b>Habitat</b></p>	<p>Sichuan, in lush bamboo forests</p>
<p><b>Physical characteristics</b></p>	<p>Fur has a black and white pattern, just like a Yinyang symbol</p>
<p><b>Personality characteristics</b></p>	<p>Ya Ya just wants to sit peacefully by herself and eat her food, stare off into the distance, or scratch an itch. Panda cubs are the cutest and most adorable little creatures of the Yangzi River Valley.</p>
<p><b>Behavioral characteristics</b></p>	<p>Aside from the brief period of time when raising children, female adult Giant Pandas live a nearly completely solitary lifestyle. Wild giant pandas mostly eat just bamboo, eating up to 18 kilos of bamboo in a single day. For young giant pandas, climbing trees is seen as a rite of passage. When a panda has successfully learned how to climb trees, this means it is capable of escaping from the mouths of carnivores. Once a panda has learned how to climb, this confirms that it no longer needs its mother. The daughter Mei Mei's childhood food is her mother's milk.</p>
<p><b>Family members</b></p>	<p>Daughter Mei Mei</p>
<p><b>Status</b></p>	<p>Giant pandas have existed on this planet for 8 million years. In China, they are considered "living fossils" and a national treasure.</p>

<p><b>Chiru</b></p>	
<p><b>Name</b></p>	<p>(No name)</p>
<p><b>Habitat</b></p>	<p>Highlands of western China</p>
<p><b>Physical characteristics</b></p>	<p>Four strong legs, agile</p>
<p><b>Behavioral characteristics</b></p>	<p>In the spring, female Chirus say goodbye to the males and migrate to Lake Zhuonai. There, they give birth to their young. Several months later they return and reunite with their mates—scientists still have no reasonable explanation for this behavior. What many people find difficult to believe is that within half an hour of birth, baby Chirus are capable of walking independently. Learning to stand steadily, however, is not so easy. But within a few days, they can run just as fast as their mothers. Once the mother and her children have learned to recognize each other by scent, they are able to establish a lifelong unbreakable bond.</p> <p>While a baby chiru is spending time learning how to tell its own mother apart from others, it will inevitably make a mistake. But no matter; the next one, or maybe the one after that, will be its real mother.</p>
<p><b>Family members</b></p>	<p>The Chiru family always stays together as one herd, forever one big family</p>

## Part 2: Relevant Science Vocabulary

Carnivore	Mammal					
Life cycle	Elevation	Habitat	Territory	Food chain	Natural predator	Climate
Plains	Alpine	Forest	Plateau	Canyon / Gorge	Bamboo forest	Cliff
Mountain range	Mountain cliffs	Valley	Nurse / nurture	Wild	Solitary	Migrate
Female (for animals)	Male (for animals)	Habits / behavior	To survive			

Proper nouns: Yangtze River Valley, Sichuan, Qinghai Plateau, Lake Zhuonai (located within the Kekexili Nature Reserve)

## Part 3: Narrative Summary: Understanding the Key Plot Points and Movie Narration

The movie's different narrative threads are connected by the changing of the seasons. Students can come up with possible endings for the film.

### Snow Leopard Da Wa's Story

*Snow Leopard Da Wa is the ruler of the Qinghai Plateau. The story begins in the spring and ends in the spring of the following year. It tells the story of Da Wa as she hunts for her two young children in very harsh environment.*

**Other animals that appear in this story: Wild Yak Bull, Marmot, Bharal**

① One spring day, Da Wa smells the odor of an outsider in her territory. She encounters another snow leopard that has invaded her territory in order to challenge her rule. The two leopards face off and the invader eventually yields. Da Wa has successfully defended her territory; more important, she has protected her cubs.

② By summer, Da Wa's cubs are already capable of climbing out of their den to play by themselves. In addition to watching her play, she has a more important mission: hunting. She loves to eat tasty yak meat, but yaks are too strong and dangerous. She is not interested in marmot, and so the bharal is her primary prey. But among the rocks the bharal's grey fur is a perfect camouflage, and its strong and powerful limbs enable it to be extremely agile. Ultimately Da Wa is victorious. She successfully captures the bharal.



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③ Under Da Wa's nurturing care, the two cubs grow up to become handsome young snow leopards. Newly weaned, the young cubs are very hungry for fresh meat, and Da Wa has just had a successful hunt. The snow leopard cubs have been keeping watch from a distance, observing their mother's every move as she hunts prey. The snow leopards hadn't begun to eat their meal when suddenly, on the other side of the valley, a rival snow leopard appears once again. This time, she brought her three full-grown sons. A serious shortage of prey has driven them to cross into Da Wa's territory for better hunting opportunities. This time, they are prepared to take everything Da Wa possesses. Both sides understand the situation clearly: in a one-on-four fight, Da Wa has no hope of survival. Da Wa faces a dilemma. She does not want to give up this hard-won food; her children are still hungry. For her children's survival, Da Wa is willing to fight to the death. But she knows she is outnumbered. Eventually Da Wa decides to give up her food, retreat from battle, and protect her cubs. The invaders are clearly not satisfied with merely taking Da Wa's prey, and they began to drive Da Wa out, declaring their intention to occupy her territory. In order to protect her children, Da Wa has no choice but to leave.

④ In winter, the temperature begins to drop sharply. After a week of living in a new territory, Da Wa still has nothing. She has no choice but to compete for a limited supply of prey in a territory wholly unfamiliar to her with other leopards that are bigger and stronger than she. She must continuously patrol the area in order to quickly familiarize herself with the terrain. At this point, the ruler of this new territory, an adult male snow leopard, has spotted her. In order to take the territory, Da Wa has to fight back, but in the end she is forced to return to her cubs. Perhaps only the love that Da Wa and her cubs have for each other will support them through this harsh winter.

⑤ Raging storms and a string of bad luck prevent Da Wa from succeeding in catching more than a meager amount of prey so far. In a stroke of good luck, a flock of bharal seeking shelter from a storm enters Da Wa's range of attack. But then, disaster strikes. A blanket of snow is hiding a stretch of sharp rocks, and as Da Wa sprint to chase her prey she injures her claws. Da Wa knows that if she and her cubs are to survive this winter, her body must maintain peak form.



A herd of bharal



Dawa crouching in the snow

⑥ The winter snow begins to melt. Da Wa is still struggling to care for her children. Da Wa's foot injury has seriously diminished her ability to hunt. She can no longer match the agility and speed of the bharal. Herdsmen have driven their yak to the field to graze. These beasts weigh ten times as much as Da Wa, and their horns are capable of delivering fatal blows. But Da Wa is her cubs' only hope for survival, so she decides to take the risk. Da Wa lunges at a baby yak and sinks her teeth into its flesh. The calf's

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mother comes to rescue her child, but Da Wa refuses to abandon her prey; she knows that this is her last chance. The mother yak rams her horns against Da Wa's body over and over again. Da Wa suffers grave injuries...

## The Golden Snub-Nosed Monkey Tao Tao's Story

*After running away from home, the little golden snub-nosed monkey Tao Tao finally learns the true meaning of family.*

**Other animals that appear in this story: Goshawk**

① Although two-year old Tao Tao no longer needs his parents to take care of his every need, his favorite thing to do after a long and crazy day is to latch onto his father's side. Tao Tao adores his father, but gets a little depressed when his father doesn't pay attention to him. He also expects to get his mother's attention, but his newborn little sister has cruelly stolen the maternal love that used to belong to Tao Tao. Tao Tao soon realizes that he is no longer the center of attention in his family. He feels this is horribly unfair.

② In the summer, Tao Tao becomes more and more disheartened. He tries his best to stay away from his sister and family. One day, he happens upon some interesting neighbors: a group of nomadic male monkeys, a few of them close to the same age as Tao Tao and with a similar experience, having lost their status within their families and then run away from home. The leader of this band of vagrant monkeys is called "Rooster". He has been in many fights throughout his life; according to legend, he lost his left eye in a fight with Tao Tao's father. Tao Tao, feeling lost and depressed, has come here to vent his feelings. On this bright and sunny afternoon, the neighbors (the nomadic monkeys) invite Tao Tao to play an old, traditional monkey game – snapping off bits of branches and leaves to enjoy. But some of the monkeys' games take things too far – sometimes they steal other monkeys' babies and kick them around like soccer balls. Tao Tao has no interest in these kinds of games. But Tao Tao still happily spends his days among the nomadic monkeys. Suddenly, a goshawk appears. The goshawk, one of these monkeys' only natural predators, lies in wait to catch one of the baby monkeys. For Tao Tao, the reality suddenly shows its brutal side, and he realizes that at any given moment his sister could also become the enemy's prey.

③ Pine nuts are the gift of autumn. Rooster and the nomadic monkeys are lucky enough to find a stretch of pine forest. After leaving his family, Tao Tao has spent nearly every day living among the vagabond monkeys. Even though his family is in the nearby woods, he doesn't want to see them. But Tao Tao's father suddenly appears with his family in tow. Tensions flare among the vagrant monkeys who had been in the middle of enjoying their feast, especially Rooster. Rooster appears to challenge Tao Tao's father to a fight, seeking revenge for his lost eye. This battle is inevitable. Tao Tao can't believe his eyes: why are adults so narrow-minded? When the two monkeys fight, all of the adult female family members gather to Tao Tao father's side. Rooster has to fight alone since the vagrant monkeys are in a state of disarray: all of the monkeys have fled and no one has come to his assistance. In the end Rooster has no choice but to retreat. Tao Tao has just discovered that his new friends are not trustworthy. They are all just selfish cowards. This makes Tao Tao completely depressed. Is it possible to have true friends in this world?

④ Winter for Tao Tao's sister is a very different experience. This is her first time to see snow. The falling snow feels uncomfortable for her, and her hands are almost frozen. But the snow also gives the monkeys a good reason to use their ability to walk on two legs. The advent of winter has not improved the relationship between Tao Tao and the nomadic monkeys. Rooster will not give Tao Tao any charity, warmth or help. Since he chose to stay with the nomadic monkeys, this must be his new reality. The violent mood of the monkey troupe begins to spread. Tao Tao gets pulled into the unrest, and even his sister isn't spared. She wants to help her older brother. Tao Tao's father decides to just stand on the sidelines and watch. This stretch of forest actually has little food left worth competing for, and Tao Tao's father plans to move his family to a slightly warmer area at a lower elevation. The bitter cold makes Tao Tao desperately long for warmth. At this moment, he truly misses his mother. Up until now, he has steadfastly refused to return to his family – perhaps he is still angry with his little sister, or maybe he wants to prove himself to his father. But right now, he just needs warmth. He decides to leave the band of vagrant monkeys and return to his family's loving care. His little sister is so happy to see him, however, life is never that simple. His father refuses to accept him. Tao Tao has no one that he can depend on, and is now in a desperate position.

⑤ At last Tao Tao is welcomed back into his family. As long as he is willing to live with the family to resist the cold, his father will let him stay. Maybe Tao Tao is trying to comprehend the true meaning of the family, or maybe he is just frozen and had no choice but to run back home. It's better than freezing outside all alone. At least his sister is glad to see him.



⑥ Spring means more food, more fleas, and more monkey babies. Although Tao Tao's relationship with his family has become much more peaceful, he rarely goes out alongside his father anymore, preferring now to venture out by himself. Tao Tao's sister has grown up and is beginning to reveal her own personality. The mother feels comfortable letting her forage by herself, or help look after other

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monkeys' babies. However, wherever there's a monkey baby, a goshawk will surely be lurking in the vicinity. Tao Tao issues a warning call. All the monkey babies are safe—except for Tao Tao's sister. Fortunately, Tao Tao responds quickly and arrives just in time to save his sister. Tao Tao has never felt so valuable before. He protected her sister purely by instinct, but this brave act has made him realize that he has really grown up. His father is very pleased. Tao Tao has returned to his family's embrace. The prodigal son has grown into his family's hero, in the eyes of his sister, a true hero.

## The Giant Panda Mother and Her Daughter, Mei Mei

*A story of maternal love between a mother who loves her child and a child who wants to be independent*  
**Other animals that appear in the story: red panda (note differences with the giant panda)**

① Ya Ya gives birth to Mei Mei. To her, raising children is the most precious stage of her life. Mother and daughter spend a few months together in their den.



② In autumn, Ya Ya and her baby finally emerge from the quiet lair. She wants to let Mei Mei see the outside world. Though pandas at this age are barely crawling, this does not affect her interest in the surrounding scenery and sounds. Mei Mei discovers another small panda. He is not really a panda, but a member of the raccoon family. But Mei Mei doesn't care, she just wants to climb up and say hello to him. Red pandas spend most of their time in trees. Mei Mei idolizes this red panda. Climbing trees is the dream of all pandababies.

Mother Ya Ya's Thoughts	Baby Mei Mei's Thoughts
Ya Ya wants to stay by her side and keep her safe, let her be immersed in maternal love.	Mei Mei has already tasted freedom – and she liked it.
Ya Ya thinks it is not yet time. This tree is too high; Mei Mei is too inexperienced to master it.	At six months, Mei Mei feels she's ready for anything, ready to take on the world!
Ya Ya's deepest hope is to keep guard and protect her daughter's safety for the rest of her life	It's hard to suppress her impulse to run free. She wants to climb trees, and feels life is an adventure. While learning, she falls down again and again, but she keeps practicing because she knows she must become independent one day soon.
Mother Ya Ya's Inner Conflict	
Ya Ya instinctively wants to protect her daughter's safety, but knows she can't protect her life. One day, she must give Mei Mei her freedom. One the one hand Ya Ya wants to respect her daughter's longing for freedom, but on the other hand, she does not want her daughter to come to any harm.	

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By spring, Mei Mei is able to climb to the top of the tree on her own without falling - an historic moment, but also point of separation.

5. Ya Ya may dote on Mei Mei too much, but she's raised a beautiful child.
6. Ya Ya gives birth to a new panda cub.

## The Chiru's Story

*A Story of Migration*

**Other animals appearing in the story: wolf**

- ① Each spring, thousands and thousands of female Chiru set out on a journey of migration. This is a time of both joy and sorrow. They bid farewell to the male chiru, but will reunite a few months later. During this period, the male Chiru can only live a lonely life. During their migration giant herds of female chiru blanket the mountains and plains of western China. Their destination is the Qinghai Plateau's mysterious Zhuonai Lake.
- ② By summer, the Chiru have reached the end of their journey: Zhuonai Lake. At Zhuonai Lake, Chiru mothers give birth to their young. The chiru remain at Zhuonai Lake until their young are strong enough to return to their habitat. The female chiru are anxious to return home, and the male chiru have been waiting a long time for them to come back.
- ③ In the fall, female Chiru head back to be reunited with their mates. But the scent of the young Chiru has attracted the attention of some predators nearby. The wolves try to separate the young chiru from their mothers. Fortunately, the young chiru are now as strong and agile as their mothers. (The wolf fails to catch the young chiru). The young chiru continue to follow their mother's scent all the way home. Although the herd is large, they remain intimate and inseparable.
- ④ Autumn – after a long journey, the females and their partners are reunited. Because of their long separation, their memories of one another have faded. But no matter—the chiru will find a new partner and begin a new family.

## Part 4: Cultural Background - Understanding the Symbolic Meaning of the Animals



In Chinese mythology, the **red-crowned crane** represents the immortal world. Red-crowned cranes are auspicious and a symbol of longevity. In Chinese mythology when someone dies, the crane carries away the soul to be reincarnated and thus continues the cycle of life. From the end, a new beginning once again.

“The **Monkey King**” is a famous character from Chinese literature, known as both a hero and a trickster.

Local people consider **chiru** to be sacred creatures.

## Part 5: Important Themes from the Film

China is a wondrous and awe-inspiring land.

The natural world is full of love, separation, and hope.

This is a story about the red-crowned crane, giant panda, chiru, golden snub-nosed monkey and snow leopard. They all call China their home.

Although it is hard for mothers to say goodbye to their children, the process of raising and caring for them brings these mothers so much pride and joy.

Death is not the end of life, but merely a part of life. The death of one being becomes part of the life of another, and so life is constantly renewed and recycled.

This great land is home to both love and suffering, but even within suffering there is still hope.

Their lives began here. Their lives ended here. They were reborn here. They were born in China.

## Part 6: Vocabulary Not Covered in the Above Material

Soar over	Come full circle	Leisurely
Contented	Carefree	Turned Upside Down Easily
Uninvited guest	Both sides suffer	To handle with skill and ease
Inevitable	At the mercy of	Accustomed to
Unique	Try one's best	Like the back of one's hand
To one's utmost ability	Year after year	Vast expanse
Many changes	To have nothing	Far apart from each other
A futile attempt	Touching (adj.)	Safety in numbers
Just right	Increasingly deep	Inviolable
Never stop	Fascinating	Full of confidence
To lurk, move in secret	Support	Familiar
Easy	Firm	Excuse
Moment	Reboot	Fight
Missing	Organization	Save Push
Neat	It seems	Design
Have	Broke into	Full
Show	Shake	To miss / to think of
Descend	Brand new	To maintain
Coax	Explore	Settled
Hidden	Urgent	Knowledge
Harassment	To replace	To care for & love someone
To watch after someone	To deeply love	Continuation
Good at	Deprived	Consumption
Lead	Announce	Poem
Otherwise	Usually	Far away
Note	Journey	Locked
Vast	City	Troubled
Movement	Magnificent	Physical strength
Melody	Bustling	Be patient
Complete	Kung fu	Gangs
Overbearing	Once	Turn of phrase
Instigator / troublemaker	Aggressive	Pasture
Members	Fantasy	Prominent
Human world	Next door	Not
Mark	Unique	Crack
Close	Breeze	Link
Real	Absolutely	Soft
Hunting field	Family	Fighting
Determination	Remember	Unknown
Distance	Long	Reinforcement
Shameful	Overlord	Cotton candy

## Part 7: Appendix – Chinese-Language Reference Materials

<http://baike.baidu.com/item/我们诞生在中国/19726142?fr=aladdin>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AH77JREIAH8&list=PLE8Heh0L6YZQKW0IW4hnqwcpf7RJLL-36>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nCH2NVLRS3o&list=PLE8Heh0L6YZQKW0IW4hnqwcpf7RJLL-36&index=6>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AEINGrV31eI&list=PLyumjGyxJtzQJuVNUApI2iVJgpaGxM9FI>

**This Youth Mandarin Guide to Disneynature *Born in China* was created by Broadway Elementary Mandarin language teacher Jiabei Li, Shanghai Jiao Tong University professor Qianfei Pan, and the staff of the UCLA Confucius Institute.**