

**THE LEGEND OF THE PANDA**

- Long years ago, Dolma, a young shepherdess, lived with her sisters in the Wolong Valley, deep in the mountains of Sichuan province. 1
- Each day, Dolma led her small flock of sheep up the steep slopes of the nearby mountain. The rat-a-tat of woodpeckers echoed as Dolma and her companions travelled past frosty waterfalls and over moss-covered rocky paths to the fragrant meadows. 2
- While the sheep grazed, Dolma collected herbs to make medicines for the villagers. She also gathered mountain blossoms—red and gold poppies, gentians as blue as the mists that veiled the mountaintops, and purple violets that lifted their tiny faces to the sunlight. 3
- On a morning when the air was sweet with spring, a young animal crept from the nearby evergreen forest. “Will you join our flock, little Beishung?” laughed Dolma. 4
- By the trickling stream, the white panda cub nibbled tender shoots. His hunger satisfied, he frolicked among the sheep and lambs like a furry acrobat celebrating the end of the bitter winter. And each day thereafter, the white cub joined Dolma’s flock to feed and play. 5
- As she had so often, one day Dolma left her flock to gather herbs. Among the dewy grasses, she filled her basket and returned to the meadow. Dolma smiled to see her peaceful flock. 6
- Suddenly, a snow leopard pounced from a tree. With teeth bared, he attacked the white cub. “Beishung!” cried Dolma, as the sheep fearfully bleated. 7
- The leopard’s sharp claws tore at the helpless little Beishung. Yet Dolma, without a thought for her own safety, grabbed a stout branch and rushed forward to beat the leopard mightily. 8
- The wounded cub withdrew weakly into the flock. The angry leopard, eager to claim a life, turned upon Dolma. Moments later, the shepherdess lay lifeless upon the trampled grass, the basket’s blossoms and herbs strewn about her. 9
- Great were the lamentations in the Wolong Valley when the people learned of Dolma’s death. Heavy was the grief of all the Beishung. They knew of Dolma’s kindness to the cub, and of the brave act that had saved him from the leopard’s claws. 10
- On the appointed day, the sorrowful villagers gathered with Dolma’s heartbroken sisters to bury the shepherdess. Grey clouds hung heavily over the mountains as the white cub led the Beishung to join the funeral procession. 11
- As the bamboo grasses rustled in damp winds, the mourners smeared themselves with ashes. The Beishung wiped their tear-filled eyes with sooty paws and hugged themselves as they wept. They covered their ears against the loud lamentations and, wherever the animals touched their snowy bodies with ash, the black soot stained forever the thick white fur. 12
- Dolma’s sisters were convinced they could not live without her. As the sisters’ cries reached the snow-capped mountaintops, the earth beneath their feet spoke to them with fierce rumblings, as if it, too, were mourning. The villagers fell back in awe as the earth suddenly split wide and received the four loving sisters. Where the meadow once lay rose a mountain of four peaks that reached beyond the clouds. 13
- And this is exactly why to this day, the giant panda, the “bamboo-eater,” wears the black marks of mourning in memory of the brave shepherdess, Dolma. His home and refuge is in the protective forests of Siguniang, the “Mountain of the Four Sisters.” 14