



Negotiating with the Past: China's Tactical Use of History, Emotion and Identity in the Sino-British Talks on the Future of Hong Kong

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Abstract

How did Chinese leaders Deng Xiaoping and Zhao Ziyang feel about Hong Kong? The existing literature has tended to see the Sino-British negotiations over the future of Hong Kong through the economic lens favoured by the British side and described the Chinese side as primarily motivated by nationalism. However, 'nationalism' remains a vague concept in need of further definition. This paper focuses on the Chinese side of the negotiation table. It unpacks what 'nationalism' meant to Deng and Zhao within the context of the negotiations by examining three interrelated components: history, identity and emotion. This paper then analyses how the Chinese side used history, identity and emotion strategically during the negotiations, focusing on the September 1982 leaders' meetings as a case study. Adopting a constructivist lens, this paper examines historical documents against frameworks and theories from the social sciences, producing an interdisciplinary analysis of Chinese negotiation tactics. It unravels how China's leaders used the country's past to broadcast the Party's stance to the people, bolster their leadership position and win the advantage over Britain in the Hong Kong negotiations.

Keywords Negotiation theory · Century of Humiliation · Emotional diplomacy · Tying hands strategy · China · Deng Xiaoping · Hong Kong

Introduction

The '1997 issue' was so called because the largest area of British Hong Kong, the New Territories, had been leased to Britain in 1898 for 99 years, to expire in 1997. The question of what to do with Hong Kong after 1997 was first raised at an official level in March 1979, when Governor MacLehose met with China's Deng Xiaoping.

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This was followed in September 1982, when British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher flew to Beijing for face-to-face meetings with Premier Zhao Ziyang and, the next day, Deng Xiaoping. Thatcher argued that Hong Kong's economic stability would benefit from the British administration continuing past 1997, but the Chinese rejected this argument [18, p. 1399; 29, ch. 3; 53, p. 96]. Formal negotiations followed and eventually produced the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration, which agreed that Hong Kong would pass from the British colonial administration to Beijing's control in 1997.

One strand of the existing English language literature interprets the negotiations in economic terms [e.g. 15, 40, 52, 66]. Many begin by 'assum[ing] that policy in Beijing [would] be determined by a dispassionate assessment of the relative costs and benefits' [30, p. 17] then proceed to weigh those costs and benefits. On the one hand, Beijing stood to gain valuable knowledge from Hong Kong at a time of reconnection with global markets, and China's economic reorientation could have stalled entirely had investor confidence been lost [27]. As Liang et al. argued, 'China needs a Hong Kong of social stability and economic prosperity' [26, p. 28, emphasis added]. On the other hand, Hong Kong's economic importance to China was perhaps overstated as, while the failure of Hong Kong's economy would have been a setback for China's economic reforms, Jao argued it would not have been fatal [21]. Furthermore, noted Barrell and Broadbent, British companies also stood to lose [3]. Thus, concluded Ma, 'China and Britain shared a *common* interest in maintaining Hong Kong as a free and prosperous city' [28, p. 740, emphasis added]. However, such balance sheet analyses see the negotiations as predominantly 'aimed at maintaining the economic prosperity' of Hong Kong [42, p. 181]. This frames the talks in terms most favoured by the British side at the expense of understanding Beijing's position. Focusing on the September 1982 meetings, this paper redresses the imbalance in the existing literature by examining the Chinese side in depth.

Another strand of the literature acknowledges that China had concerns over and above economic ones. These writers often explained that Beijing was motivated by nationalism and an abiding desire to regain sovereignty over Hong Kong [e.g. 11, pp. 479–481; 17, p. 105; 23, pp. 107–110; 29, pp. 95 and 99; 41, p. 70; 53, p. 95; 57, p. 180]. Yet such works have left 'nationalism' barely defined or entirely undefined. This paper fills the descriptive void by interrogating what 'nationalism' meant to Deng Xiaoping which, in turn, provides a greater understanding of the importance of sovereignty. In the context of the 1997 issue, 'nationalism' is divided into three interconnected aspects: a particular, politicised understanding of history that framed how the Chinese thought about the 1997 issue; an attendant, negative emotional aspect; and a sense of both national and personal identity. These three aspects build on observations made in my earlier paper [18] and are illustrated and defined in greater detail in the body of this paper.

After providing greater descriptive depth to the term 'nationalism', this paper then turns to analysing the Chinese position using theories of negotiation. As Wei et al. have recently argued: 'The existing literature on the negotiations [...] is heavily descriptive and predominantly biographical in nature' [56, p. 2]. Few studies have attempted to go beyond description using frameworks of analysis. One notable exception is Gao. Gao concluded that, firstly, the British were disadvantaged in an asymmetrical power relationship because the Chinese had 'a high risk-taking propensity' [11, p. 480] and, secondly, that it was Thatcher's comments that made the

1997 issue a matter of Chinese nationalism [11, p. 481]. This paper builds on Gao's first point by examining *why* the Chinese had a high risk-taking propensity and *how* they created this asymmetrical power dynamic. In disagreement with Gao's second point, however, this paper argues that Hong Kong was a matter of Chinese nationalism before Thatcher's comments by showing how the Chinese used nationalism to counter Britain's economics-based argument.

By eschewing the hard power lens of economics that sees the negotiations in terms favoured by the British side and rejecting balance sheet calculations, this paper contributes both descriptive depth and an analysis of the talks focused on the under-examined Chinese side of the negotiation table. The significance of these contributions is to redress the imbalance in the English language literature, as understanding only one side is inadequate for understanding bilateral negotiations, and to move beyond description to analyse Chinese negotiating strategies.

Sources and Theories

An interdisciplinary approach is adopted to produce an analysis at the intersection of the humanities and social sciences. Historical archive documents and newspapers are analysed using theories of negotiation, identity and diplomacy. In lieu of Chinese Foreign Ministry archives, the main archival source is declassified British official records through which the Chinese position is discerned. A limitation of this is that, despite the aim to move away from the dominance of the British side, the vast majority of the material used has already been filtered through the British official mind. Nonetheless, British files offer valuable insights into the Chinese perspective.

Rather than seeing these sources through the lens of economics, this paper instead adopts a constructivist lens. Constructivism holds that politics and international relations are at their core exchanges between people whose identities and embeddedness within social contexts come to shape state-state interactions [58, p. 76]. This lens, therefore, enables a move away from the hard power concerns of the British side and reveals how China's leaders felt about Hong Kong.

To analyse identity, this paper adopts Abdelal et al.'s four-part framework, all four of which will be illustrated and examined in the body of this paper [1]. The first, cognitive models, is where identity is created by the sharing of 'a *worldview*, or a framework that allows members of a group to make sense [...] explanations of how the world works' [1, p. 25, original emphasis]. Second, relational comparisons, is where identity is 'defined by what it is not' [1, p. 23], such as by using an in-group/out-group division to refine identity. Third, social purposes is where a 'group attaches specific goals to its identity [...] social purposes create obligations to engage in practices that make the group's achievement of a set of goals more likely' [1, p. 22]. Lastly, constitutive norms are 'the practices that define that identity and lead other actors to recognize it' [1, p. 20]; such norms are the formal and informal rules of how members within a group ought to act.

This paper also engages with what Hall calls 'emotional diplomacy'. This is not simply where a diplomat experiences emotion. Instead, emotional diplomacy is

where emotion is expressed by officials in a coordinated, strategic way for a particular purpose [14, p. 2–3]. This paper presents a case of emotional diplomacy and, moreover, evaluates the extent to which emotional diplomacy and the personal emotions of China's leaders overlapped.

Lastly, this paper argues that the Chinese deployed the tying hands negotiation strategy. This is where a negotiator persuades their interlocutor to move nearer to their own position by claiming that the set of possibilities open to them is extremely limited [31]. Often, they will achieve this by placing the blame for the narrowness of their options upon some party whom the other negotiator cannot influence. Having convinced their counterpart of the immovability of their position, the negotiator is then able to contrive an outcome that is far nearer to their own initial position than that of their counterpart.

This paper proceeds as follows: In the next section, the context of the September 1982 talks is provided. Then, the term 'nationalism' is detailed by dividing it into three key, interrelated areas: history, identity and emotion. After this, an analysis of how Chinese nationalism beat Britain's argument in the Hong Kong negotiations with reference to the tying hands strategy. The penultimate section reflects on the extent to which Beijing was or was not bluffing before concluding.

Context

The domestic and international political context in which Beijing's leaders operated shaped their position on Hong Kong ahead of the September 1982 meetings. Shortly after Mao died in 1976, Hua Guofeng became Chairman of the Communist Party of China (hereafter, the Party). In July 1977, Deng returned to work after being politically purged for a third time [13, pp. 81–89]. A brief and bloodless power struggle between Hua and Deng ensued: inside the Party, support for Hua waned and eventually Hua conceded control to Deng's reformist faction by December 1978 [16, p. 83; 54, pp. 228–246]. Deng did not take up the mantle of Chairman—he did not hold that position at any point during his lifetime—but nonetheless, *de facto* overall control was his. Even having wrestled power from Hua, however, the late 1970s and early 1980s remained an unsteady time as Deng consolidated control and fended off potential challenges; indeed, cliques and infighting plagued Deng's administration throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s [13, ch. 8; 18, p. 1394; 67].

Soon after taking power from Hua, Deng spearheaded several epochal shifts away from the policies of his predecessor. The most significant change was to overhaul the basis of the Party's claim to rule. Before Deng, the Party's legitimacy had been based upon ideology and continuous revolution. However, the Cultural Revolution had failed to produce the promised utopia and instead bankrupted Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought leading to a crisis of faith in the Party [7, p. 25; 22, p. 80].

Deng replaced the foundation of Party legitimacy with the setting and attainment of goals. This effectively introduced performance indicators to quantitatively demonstrate the Party's indispensability to the Chinese people [38, p. 366]. Three objectives were invested with administration-defining importance: economic

development, world peace and reunification [8, p. 3]. The first of these is the most well-remembered: the Deng era has become synonymous with China's economic reform and opening, and some scholars have argued that the language of objectives and statistics characterised the Deng era [4, pp. 8–9]. Yet reunification was stated in the same breath and on parity in terms of importance to Deng.

In Abdelal et al.'s terms, defining the group's goals and actions towards a set of goals is the identity-forming activity of social purposes [1, p. 22]. When non-democratic polities justify their position by setting targets for the nation to fulfil, they often adopt a discourse in which the leader's control is seen as essential for their fulfilment and which encourages aspiration towards their attainment. Failure or frustration of attainment can be blamed on outsiders and opponents, allowing leaders to threaten and depose their enemies [37, p. 112]. This discourse is perpetuated and engrained through education, campaigns, state propaganda and other means, emphasising the need for all members of the nation to share responsibility. Within this context, Deng's setting of social purposes formed, in part, a new sense of Chinese national identity.

Another shift under Deng was a slow change in the focus of reunification away from Taiwan towards Hong Kong [54, pp. 492–493]. During his lifetime, Mao had put more effort into Taiwan reunification and generally let Hong Kong be. Under Deng, however, the object of reunification changed gradually from Taiwan to Hong Kong at some point in the early 1980s. The change was partly inspired by a meeting in March 1979, when Hong Kong's Governor Murray MacLehose discussed the 1997 issue with Deng. More impactful, however, was China's changing relations with the USA. In January 1979, Washington switched its diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing thereby normalising relations and committing to ending its defence treaty with Taiwan. This initially gave Beijing hope that reunification with Taiwan was nearing. But that April, the USA passed the Taiwan Relations Act which implied the country's willingness to defend Taiwan militarily should Beijing mount an attack. China was loath to upset its burgeoning and still delicate relations with the USA and knew that pursuing reunification with Taiwan at that time would only create tension. Hong Kong, therefore, became the focus of reunification. Targeting Hong Kong did not mean giving up on Taiwan completely. Indeed, Beijing hoped to use Hong Kong to demonstrate the workability of the 'one country, two systems' model and convince Taipei to enter into discussions [11, p. 479].

By the time of the leaders' meetings in September 1982, Beijing held only scant plans for Hong Kong. In April 1978, the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office was formed with Liao Chengzhi as its Head, but Hong Kong's return was not yet a priority [29, p. 50]. The following year, Deng tasked Liao with producing recommendations about 'the time and method of solving the Hong Kong issue' [10, p. 38]. When Liao reported back, he recommended adapting principles originally developed for Taiwan for Hong Kong and making Hong Kong a Special Administrative Zone. These proposals were formally agreed by the Central Committee Secretariat in December 1981 [24, p. 186]. However, Liao's proposals were no more than headlines. At Deng's request, therefore, further details were worked up and put forward by March 1982. They included maintaining Hong Kong's free port status and

capitalist system [29, p. 76]. Still, by 1982, Beijing's Hong Kong policy was barely more advanced than this. Only one matter was certain: Beijing must retake Hong Kong.

China's Past and Hong Kong's Future

When Liao and China's leaders were considering Hong Kong's future, the past was particularly important. A collective memory of the nation's historical humiliations framed the 1997 issue; collective memories are a species of 'cognitive model' and thus constitutive of identity [1, p. 25; 18, p. 1394]. It was this collective memory that lent the 1997 issue a painful emotional charge and one which informed the Chinese leaders' sense of national and personal identity. Thus, history, emotion and identity were inseparably intertwined.

To the Chinese leadership, as Zhao told Thatcher during their meeting in September 1982, Hong Kong was 'an issue left over from history' [49]. China's 'Century of Humiliation' had begun 140 years earlier with the ceding of Hong Kong Island to the British in the 1842 Treaty of Nanking. Thereafter, a succession of embarrassing episodes, compromises and treaties that granted more territory, concessions and power to foreign states compounded the Chinese people's sense of their nation's weakness. Stories of the victimisation of the nation were told and retold forming an intensely self-deprecating collective memory.

The Century of Humiliation discourse reached its zenith during the Republican era (1912–1949). In the 1910s, a day of reflection was established to encourage contemplation of the ills that had befallen the country [5, pp. 188–190]. In the 1920s, schoolteachers were ordered to allot sufficient time for impressing upon their students the enormity of China's victimisation [22, p. 69]. In the 1930s when Japan invaded China, the sense of oppression was redoubled as the long list of embarrassments marched towards 100 years. Thus, the Century of Humiliation discourse entered the zeitgeist and influenced how events were perceived, interpreted and felt.

After 1949, the Party often used emotion as a tool in propaganda, education, campaigns and other areas of activity [35, pp. 19–20]. But the Century of Humiliation narrative specifically played a relatively small role as, in its place, the Party instead focused on valorising China's victories and past glories [55, p. 798]. Although Mao sometimes harboured a sense of victimhood, this was informed more by his perception of how the rest of the world treated China in contemporary affairs than on China's historical treatment [2, p. 213; 55, p. 784; 63, p. 1003]. Mao's efforts towards Taiwan did not require the Century of Humiliation discourse because Taiwan was not a disgrace at the hands of foreigners and was rather a matter of regaining territory lost to the Guomindang during the Civil War.

Under Deng, China's Century of Humiliation discourse was revived [35, p. 23; 64, p. 25]. China's past played an increasingly important role in Deng's efforts to find a new basis for the Party's power and in support of the reunification goal. Thus, it became the historic mission of China's leaders to wipe the nation clean of these humiliations and this included taking back Hong Kong [17, p. 105; 41, p. 1394; 18, p. 70; 54, p. 511].

Allusions to China's history were evident in the September 1982 meetings. Deng said that failing to regain sovereignty over Hong Kong would have made modern China 'like the China of the [Qing] dynasty', the terminal period of imperial rule when China was considered to be at its weakest. Allowing the British to continue to administer Hong Kong, he said, would have meant that China's 'present leaders were like Li Hongzhang' [50], a Qing-era minister vilified as a traitor for having signed several areas of China over to foreigners. Here, Deng rendered both national and personal identity in terms of opposition, both of which are illustrations of what Abdelal et al. call relational comparisons [1, p. 23]. Deng rejected identification with Li Hongzhang and construed his China in antithesis to the feckless Qing. A particular interpretation of history, powerfully negative feelings and an attendant sense of identity are all interconnected and evident in Deng's comments.

Zhao insisted that China's position was based on 'sovereignty, territorial integrity and the national feelings of the Chinese people' [49]. Notably, Zhao did not list the preservation of Hong Kong's prosperity amongst the factors that formed the basis of Beijing's position. Within the context of the Century of Humiliation discourse, 'sovereignty' was far from being a value-neutral, legalistic or merely descriptive term, but instead as carried weighty emotions with connections through more than a hundred years of national history. As the 'Chinese people had never recognised those treaties' [49], Zhao continued, nor could the Party. Moreover, Deng said that if they did not reunite Hong Kong with the mainland, 'the people would have every reason no longer to put faith in their leaders' [50]. Zhao echoed Deng's hyperbolic language: 'Any Chinese Government which failed to recover sovereignty would not be able to account to its people' [49].

Deng and Zhao held a strong sense of how they *ought* to act as China's leaders, which is an example of what Abdelal et al. call constitutive norms [1, p. 20]. Deng felt his position as a paramount leader required him to reunite Hong Kong with the mainland in 1997 [18, p. 1394]. To have acted otherwise would have made a mockery of his and the Party's leadership, breaking the rules of acceptability and undermining his identity as China's leader. The same principle extends to the leaders' stated conceptions of the beliefs held by their domestic public: that the Chinese people were also invested in the reunification of Hong Kong.

As almost all media in China during this period was ultimately dictated by the Party, state newspapers provide an additional window to understanding the official position and are again seen to reflect the Century of Humiliation discourse. A representative article is 'Talking about Hong Kong and Macao issues' (*Tantan Xiang-gang, Aomen wenti*, 谈谈香港、澳门问题), which first appeared in Chinese in *Shi-jie Zhishi* (世界知识, *World Affairs*), a publication under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and was later republished in English some weeks before Thatcher's September 1982 visit. The article, supposedly about the 1997 issue, spills much ink to an exhaustive retelling of the First Opium War and China's victimisation. Within this context, Hong Kong is described as 'the sacred territory of our country since ancient times' stolen from China by the British, who are derided as 'aggressors' [43]. Just as Deng rejected the identification of his China with that of the Qing dynasty, the article draws oppositional comparisons between the Qing, which it denounces as 'weak and incompetent', and the Party, which it says will 'resolve the issues of Hong

Kong' [43]. The conclusion is that China, the victim, will be saved by the Party, the righter of historical wrongs.

Another instructive piece was published in *Renmin Ribao* (人民日报, *People's Daily*), the most widely circulated newspaper in China and the Party's mouthpiece [12, 61, p. 195]. Like *Shijie Zhishi*, *Renmin Ribao* was monitored by British officials for indications of Chinese policy [45]. This article is about a patriotic education campaign and showcases emotive language. It reports that the campaign aimed at addressing 'contemporary youth's lack of understanding of the motherland's [zuguó, 祖国] past' [65]. The use of 'zuguó' rather than a more neutral term, such as 'guojia' (国家, country), carries a more sentimental meaning: 'a place that has birthed and nourished its people and to which a duty is owed' with the 'zu' component evoking ancestors [44, p. 79]. The article also evokes the Century of Humiliation discourse in describing 'the history of imperialist aggression and plunder of China in the past 100 years' [65].

The Century of Humiliation and familial discourses are sometimes combined with ethnonationalism to create an in-group versus out-group binary. In another article, for instance, appeals are made to 'Taiwan compatriots [*tongbao*, 同胞], Hong Kong and Macao compatriots [*tongbao*], and overseas compatriots [*tongbao*]' [32]. Composed of the characters for 'same' and 'blood' or 'countryman', '*tongbao*' is again used to pull on levers of ancestry and ethnicity. The *Shijie Zhishi* article also refers to Hong Kong 'compatriots [*tongbao*]' who, it says, have since 1949 'loved the socialist motherland' [43]. '*Tongbao*' is used to separate 'us' (those with Chinese ancestry) from 'them' (those without). State media had exercised othering binaries such as these since the Mao era to distinguish friend from enemy [9, p. 83]; the same method applied here to ethnicity is observable in these articles from the early years of Deng's leadership. Using the same word to describe those 'compatriots' within and outside the geographical bounds of mainland China, the article claims discursive extraterritoriality, extending from Chinese nationals within China's physical boundary outwards to descendants anywhere in the world. These articles all reflect how a sense of national identity underscored by a unifying mission and redoubled with particular choices of language was constructed based around the Century of Humiliation discourse.

The 'nationalism' often ascribed to the Chinese leaders is seen to be comprised of three interconnected attributes. Nationalism was informed by China's past: the treatment of the nation at the hands of other powers creating a sense of historical injustice and a readiness to interpret current events as following in the same pattern. Associated with this were negative emotions including victimisation, unfairness and a weariness towards allowing history to repeat itself lest the nation become victimised once again. In turn, a sense of identity formed around these historical facts and the emotions that accompanied them. The Century of Humiliation narrative was a cognitive model, framing the understanding of events. Deng's reunification goal created a shared social purpose based around righting historical wrongs. Constitutive norms were created in turn, arbitrating between the acts that were and were not acceptable: those that contributed towards reunification were encouraged and those that did not were villainous. Lastly, by rendering themselves and the contemporary Chinese nation in opposition to Qing China and traitors from the past

such as Li Hongzhang, China's leaders drew relational comparisons which further refined identity.

National humiliation framed how Deng and Zhao saw Hong Kong, as is evident in their descriptions of the 1997 issue during their meetings with Thatcher. This discourse and the relational comparisons it provided carried an emotional charge. Failure to achieve reunification, they claimed, represented an unthinkable repetition of history, was antithetical to their roles and represented a potential end to the Party itself.

Negotiating with the Past

Through a constructivist analysis of declassified archives, the previous section fleshed out the term 'nationalism', divided it into three aspects and showed how this framed China's position on Hong Kong. This section turns from description to analysis and shows how the Chinese used history, emotion and identity to their advantage as a negotiation tactic. Specifically, it argues that the Chinese adopted the tying hands strategy, which is where one negotiator convinces the other that they cannot move from their own position and thereby draws them nearer to their own position.

It is necessary to examine the British position to contrast it with the Chinese position. However, as argued in the Introduction, the British position has already been interrogated by the existing literature and so it is only briefly described here. The British saw the 1997 issue as predominantly an economic one: they argued that investor confidence depended upon a continuation of the colonial status quo and that any announcement that Beijing would take over would cause Hong Kong's economy to collapse, damaging China's economic reform in the process [18, 29, 53]. Thatcher put forward that the 'common objective' shared by both governments was 'maintaining the prosperity and stability of Hong Kong' [50]. Therefore, she advised that it would be in both governments' interests for Hong Kong to continue being administered by Britain beyond 1997. Knowing that the Chinese were concerned about sovereignty, Thatcher sought to draw 'a distinction between sovereignty and administration' [50]. This would allow Beijing to continue asserting sovereignty without requiring Britain to cease administering Hong Kong, upon which the colony's economic vitality rested. Effectively, as Thatcher told her own ministers away from the negotiation table, she was offering China 'merely titular sovereignty' [48] in exchange for continued administration.

In contrast, the Chinese insisted that they did not prioritise Hong Kong's economy above all else. Addressing Thatcher, Zhao rejoined: '[i]f it came to a choice between the two, China would put sovereignty above prosperity and stability' [49]. Sovereignty in particular was held up as being more important than Hong Kong's economy because of the relationship between China's past and sovereignty over Hong Kong in the future. When foreign concessions had appeared across China more than a hundred years before, foreign powers often protected their own people from so-called 'barbaric' Chinese law by exercising extraterritorial rights [25, p. 886]. History had taught the Chinese that the sovereign and administrator must be one and the same. This separated the ostensive sovereign from the local administration in

practice. Consequently, Thatcher's suggestion to divide the two concepts was anathema to the Chinese.

In sum, the two sides saw the 1997 issue in opposing ways. Whereas Thatcher focused on the colony's financial future, the Chinese were fixed on the past. Whereas the British argument appealed to rationality, emotion was central to the Chinese position. Lastly, whereas Thatcher conceived of a distinction drawn between sovereignty and administration, this was not shared amongst the Chinese who found the proposed division objectionable.

The Chinese side was ostensibly hampered by the expectations upon them from the public, the Party and history itself severely limiting the options open to them. Yet Deng and Zhao turned their apparent constraints to their advantage using the tying hands strategy. This strategy rests on the counterintuitive ability of a negotiator that holds a slimmer range of acceptable outcomes than their interlocutor and who is able to convince their interlocutor that this is so to derive power from their seemingly more limited position [31, p. 28]. It relies on the idea that the negotiator who has a greater degree of flexibility in their position and who presumably wishes to reach an agreement rather than see the collapse of negotiations will draw nearer to the position of a negotiator who claims that their options are fewer [36, p. 440]. This can only work when one of the two negotiators has room to manoeuvre and where there is a degree of crossover between the negotiators' options. It also requires convincing the negotiator with more flexibility that the other has less room for manoeuvre (whether or not their options are truly as constrained as they claim), which relies upon information asymmetry. In any case, the tying hands strategy is not without risk as there is always the possibility of stalemate [19, p. 405].

Beijing's leaders claimed that their hands were tied on a number of counts. In referencing the feelings of the public, rejecting Li Hongzhang and the Qing dynasty, and worrying aloud of the possible Party-ending consequences of failing to achieve reunification, they shifted the blame for their limited position onto the people, the government and history itself. Moreover, they claimed, the issue was one of identity. As Womack explains, identity is a virtually non-negotiable variable. It is formed through a reflective equilibrium with the societal context in which actors are embedded. Consequently, to overhaul any (significant) aspect of identity requires a marked shift in the society it describes [59, p. 63]. Thatcher could negotiate with Deng and Zhao, but she could not negotiate with China's population of a billion people, the entire Party or history itself nor could she counter individual and national identity which all contrived to tie the Chinese leaders' hands.

Showing no room for manoeuvre was a risky move: claiming there were no other options could have quickly deadlocked the talks. However, as Gao has argued, the need to resolve the 1997 issue predisposed China's leaders to a greater level of risk taking [11, p. 480]. In adopting the tying hands strategy, the Chinese calculation must have been that the 1997 issue was of less importance to the British actors than to themselves. Thatcher appealed to the supposedly shared imperative of maintaining Hong Kong's economic stability and argued that Britain had a duty (which is not necessarily an emotion) to reach an agreement that would be acceptable to the people of Hong Kong [18, 29, 40, 53, 56]. The political cost of failure for Thatcher would have been much less severe than the supposedly Party-ending consequences

for the Chinese. It can hardly be said, therefore, that Thatcher harboured stronger feelings than Deng and Zhao about Hong Kong. Had the British adopted a similarly bullish position, the talks may have collapsed before they had even begun—but they did not.

By adopting this tactic, Beijing established an intransigent position in September 1982. Having solidified their position, it was the British who finally relented. Six months on and having made no real progress, Thatcher penned a letter to Zhao making the first of what would become a series of concessions to China [51]. This and many other exchanges led eventually to the signing of the Joint Declaration in 1984, which decided Hong Kong's future.

Beijing was able to hold ground and draw the British nearer to its own position over time. The Chinese did not simply reject Thatcher's assertion of the primacy of Hong Kong's economy and the suggestion of dividing sovereignty into a sovereign and an administrator. They also adopted the tying hands strategy, turning their limited room for manoeuvre into a way of cementing their own position thereby ensuring that the British would have to compromise. By wielding the pressure of history, emotion and identity to convince Thatcher that their hands were tied, Deng and Zhao narrowed the scope of acceptable negotiation outcomes and established their position as early as September 1982.

Tied or a Trick?

Were Deng's hands truly tied or was this all a ruse? In other words, was this an episode of emotional diplomacy or a show of personal emotion? It is probable that both played a part.

This period in Deng's leadership was especially unsettled. China was finding its feet after the Cultural Revolution and Deng's economic reforms would not bear fruit for several years yet. Taiwan had become an ever-more distant prospect as China navigated its relations with the USA. Deng had made the achievement of objectives a necessary part of the Party's ruling legitimacy, supplanting an ideology that had prevailed for decades. Deng was busy redefining the Party, China and the country's relationship with the world. The expectations of the Party were upon Deng and those around him who sought to justify their rule by demonstrating wins, such as securing the return of Hong Kong.

Likewise, it is probable that the expectations of the Chinese public were cited both rhetorically as a tactic and truly a matter that concerned Deng. It would be an oversimplification to say that Deng, as paramount leader, had nothing to fear from the people. One might argue that they could not, for instance, vote him out of office and so obtaining the return of Hong Kong would not trouble Deng's position. However, this would underestimate the permissiveness required to avoid revolt or another civil war. Whether or not the Chinese public actually bore pressure upon Deng and his colleagues cannot be known and nor did matter in the context of the talks: Beijing's leaders only had to convince Thatcher that they were exerting pressure upon the leadership to act in a certain way. It is nonetheless believable that there was a weight to these expectations.

In assessing the relative weights of bluff versus reality, however, there are also good arguments in favour of an emotional diplomacy reading. The public may have formed an expectation but this would have been, at least in part, due to messages broadcast by state media. Whereas the leaders claimed they felt domestic pressure pressing upwards, the newspapers cited above show that it was the state that actively stoked society's emotions. As the Party directed state media, attention could simply have been directed away from Hong Kong: it had already been directed away from Taiwan.

Deng may have asserted that reunifying Hong Kong was both a goal for the nation and also a personal mission that, in part, defined him. But goals and identities are not unchanging: Deng was actively engaged in rewriting the very underpinnings of the Party and fundamentally changing China's goals and identity. Indeed, the Chinese public's attitude towards many other matters (including the market economy and relations with the USA) changed during this period. Selecting goals other than Hong Kong reunification and minimising state rhetoric around this would have reflected on national, and thus personal, identity. Relatedly, the excuse that failure to reunify Hong Kong would have entailed a collapse of the Party was overblown as Mao spent three decades trying to reunite Taiwan but his failure to do so did not destroy the Party.

There are also practical reasons to think that the Chinese were being tactical rather than off-the-cuff. Both sides knew that the Hong Kong issue would be raised during Thatcher's September 1982 visit. Though they did not have a detailed Hong Kong policy, it is improbable that the Chinese would not have prepared to discuss the matter. Moreover, the words, arguments and emotions Zhao and Deng used mirrored each other closely. This suggests a coordinated use of emotion for diplomatic effect than an explosion of personal feelings.

Deng and Zhao appear to have collaborated in the art of emotional diplomacy. Yet emotional diplomacy likely shared common ground with the personal emotions of China's leaders. Public and Party expectations both exerted pressure and were used to excuse a limited range of options. History both framed how the leaders saw the issue and provided an argument against the British. Revulsion at Thatcher's suggestions was somewhat genuine and somewhat performative. Lastly, the professed fear at the Party-ending consequences of failing to achieve reunification was likely both used tactically and stated truthfully.

Conclusion

In the September 1982 talks, Deng and Zhao shifted the blame for the intransigence of their position onto people and issues that Thatcher had no control over. Using the tying hands strategy, they countenanced cerebral logic with the curveball of emotion. In the absence of a comprehensive rebuttal, the Chinese position was effectively left unchallenged giving the Chinese the advantage even before formal negotiations got underway.

When seen through the economic lens favoured by much of the existing scholarship, Thatcher's argument appears pragmatic, and the Chinese reply seems reckless and obstinate. When reviewed through a constructivist lens, however, the range

of pressures upon the Chinese and the narrowness of the British argument become apparent. Economic concerns were not entirely absent from the minds of the Chinese [60], but, this paper shows, the trio of history, emotion and identity were central to China's motivations and negotiating tactics. Adopting a constructivist lens, therefore, has demonstrable value in understanding how China's leaders saw domestic and international political issues.

This paper has also argued that Deng and Zhao's actual emotions coincided with a coordinated attempt to fix China's position at the very earliest point in the Hong Kong talks. While it is likely that domestic pressure, the weight of historical expectations and a sense of personal identity influenced China's leaders, this paper has argued that there is also good reason to think that China's leaders knowingly used emotion to their advantage as part of emotional diplomacy.

Lastly, this paper has analysed how a particular discourse influenced state-state relations. Equally as interesting, however, is how the same discourse mediated state-society interactions. Further research is needed to examine this level of analysis to determine why official discourse changed between the Mao and Deng eras, and how it was projected through media, education, campaigns and other forms of socialisation. Soon after September 1982, the Chinese began leaking information on their position to journalists in order to impress the way in which they saw the 1997 issue into the general consciousness. Officials echoed the line that China prioritised sovereignty over prosperity and stability [46]. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs briefed that the nineteenth-century treaties were unequal [47]. China continued to employ ethnonationalist rhetoric, for instance, in welcoming a delegation of Hong Kong, Taiwan and Macao compatriots (*tongbao*) to the Great Hall of the People to mark National Day and publicised this in *Renmin Ribao* [33]. Political discourse during the Deng period has been characterised as one of 'prosaic politics': bureaucratic in tone with a rhetoric revolving around 'tangible economic success' to evidence China's economic reforms [4, p. 17]. Yet, the state newspapers quoted above show instead that emotion was sometimes a central tool. Deng era political rhetoric was not only technocratic but affective, too.

Further research is also required into how the same and similar discourses continue to frame Hong Kong today. Inside mainland China, the national humiliation discourse continues to position China as a victim, and remains pervasive in policymaking and education as an important means of bolstering nationalist sentiment and supporting the Party's continued hold on power [20, p. 196; 63]. For instance, a recent state-sponsored history book with a preface penned by President Xi Jinping begins with the 1840s Opium War and proceeds to recount advances, particularly those by Party members, towards rejuvenation after national suffering [34]. Interpretations of the historical intersections between Britain, Hong Kong and China remain carefully guided by particular language choices, such as using 'return' rather than 'handover' or 'decolonisation' reflecting a Party-centric interpretation in which Hong Kong is seen as always having belonged to Beijing with reunification representing a restoration of the historical norm [39, p. 236]. Chinese state discourse continues to use race and Chinese-foreign binary, particularly with regard to Hong Kong [6, p. 92]. Lastly, terms that express the inevitability of Hong Kong's 'return' to the maternal 'motherland', reuniting all Chinese 'compatriots' and implications

that the Party shall act as a caring parent can now be found not only in China when talking about Hong Kong but also inside Hong Kong, too [62, p. 20].

As this episode from the Sino-British negotiations demonstrates, it is incumbent upon those negotiating with Beijing to understand how officials see China's past, as history continues to frame China's international relations and national identity, and to discern the extent to which emotive vocabulary is or is not a performance of emotional diplomacy.

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Declarations

Conflict of Interest The author declares no competing interests.

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