

FOCUS

A new Mrs Thatcher rises in the East

WHEN MRS THATCHER arrived at the Great Hall of the People for the first time on Wednesday she received an unpleasant surprise. It was the first encounter on Chinese soil between a British prime minister and the Chinese leadership, but the most conspicuous figure turned out to be wearing a lushly-tailored pin-striped suit and the glad-handing smile of a politician running for major office.

This was not Zhao Ziyang, the Chinese premier, who was accoutred in the familiar high-necked jacket and hardly needs to court popularity. It was Y. K. Pao, Knight of the British Empire and one of the richest men in the world, Pao was very much one of the party—the Communist Chinese party. As the British side sipped their Dragon Well tea, they tried to figure out how Y.K. had managed to smuggle himself into this meticulously prepared meeting between East and West.

Pao, however, is an emblem of what the meeting was all about. He has made his fortune in Hong Kong. He also builds ships in Shanghai, and is a favoured friend of the Peking government. Ultimately, he may have a part to play in settling the Hong Kong problem: which is the problem of how to make the colony safe for people like Y. K. Pao to go on making money after China asserts her sovereignty—and how to ensure that China continues getting 40 per cent of her hard currency through this capitalist entrepot.

All the same, the British were miffed to see Pao grinning across the teacups. They think he's very pushy. When tea was over and they changed rooms for substantive talks, he even had to be barred by security men from moving in alongside Zhao. Later, at the decorous welcoming banquet for 200—held in a hall which could have seated 2,000—he walked round toasting everyone in sight.

The British don't merely deplore Pao's lack of breeding. They think he could be a damn nuisance. With all his contacts in Peking, someone, they fear, might imagine he had inside knowledge of British tactics, an assumption which would,

Inside Politics

INSIDE CHINA



HUGO YOUNG
Political Editor
follows
Mrs Thatcher
on her
Far Eastern tour

familiar Thatcher was still unreconstructed. This was Thatcher Western-style, all for going in and bashing the Japanese hard for invading British markets and refusing us access to theirs. Overflowing with statistics, she proposed beating Prime Minister Suzuki over the head with them, and threatening retaliation by the whole EEC.

But she was talked out of it by her officials. On the first night in Tokyo, almost numb from jet-lag, an Eastern Thatcher was born. This is a personage some people in Britain may find hard to credit. It is soothing and tolerant. It knows all about "face", which opponents must never be allowed to lose. It talks obliquely: referring coyly, for example, to "the need to prevent aggression", rather than crowing about the Falklands and rounding on the infamous Japanese for voting with Argentina at the United Nations.

of course, be entirely false.

The British have taken great care over this visit. It has entailed, among other things, the re-programming of a prime minister in ways entirely alien to her. In China, as in Japan, restraint has taken over from straight talking, code-language from emphatic declamations.

Above all, Mrs Thatcher has accepted that oriental leaders would rather read signals than lectures. The British don't want a Hong Kong tycoon, however well connected, to screw up the signals. One of them said: "Thank God we didn't get in there and find him sitting in one of our seats."

THE THATCHER retraining has been done on the job. Although Whitehall reckons her exceptionally good at the diplomacy of meeting foreign leaders, she doesn't like foreign countries. This is the first big trip she has actually wanted to undertake—mainly because it has concrete objectives, which she much prefers to the vague incantations so often associated with summitry.

In Japan the objective was trade. When she got to Tokyo, however, the

It also presents a novel picture of Britain. Instead of the power-mad unions and overmanned industries chronicled in Tory party propaganda, we now have a country which is "virtually strike-free in the private sector", to which all sensible Japanese investors ought to be attracted. No longer torpid and depressed, we are inventive and well-managed.

It was a great sales pitch, and the Japanese showed her a slightly incredulous respect. She came not to harangue but to admire. She sometimes sounded as though she would like to make all the British into Japanese.

At the final Tokyo press conference, this aloofness from political wrangling reached its peak: the transformation was complete. For the first time in my life, I witnessed British journalists standing up when a politician entered the room. Was this induced by the sub-Versailles magnificence of the Akasaka Palace, where she was staying? Or possibly by the regal echoes of her self-effacing choice of words: "One has been mentioning undersea radar," she said, and "One is not aware at all of being a woman."

In a sense, all of this was



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9月22日晚，北京人民大会堂举行宴会，欢迎美国女相玛格丽特·撒切尔夫人和丹尼斯·撒切尔先生。

a preparation for China, the original home of inscrutability, where even a statement such as "We must talk about Hong Kong" produces a frisson of horror by its crude explicitness. The new Eastern Thatcher was, for a time, fully equal to the task.

WHEN SHE came here before, in 1977, she committed herself with characteristic clarity: "The spark of the human spirit will defeat the Chinese revolution." Now she is less sure. What she was referring to, she says, was the Cultural Revolution, now dead and buried. About the China of Deng Xiaoping, she is more tactful.

She saw something of it. There's now a small free market in agricultural produce which, of course, she liked. She heard a concert at the Central Conservatory of Music, closed for ten years



Y. K. Pao: glad-handing

before 1977, its teachers despatched to break their fingers in the fields. At the Central Academy of Fine Arts, she saw how Chinese painting is done.

Wherever Mrs Thatcher went, she was applauded. What the people really thought, I do not know. Unlike the Japanese, they smiled and clapped a great deal. Leading dull, unchanging and often hopeless lives, they probably liked the diversion. There was nothing perfunctory about any of the Great White Lady's responses.

In keeping with Eastern manners, every nuance was correct. The public speeches were laced with the appropriate dabs of history, and grace notes from Chinese proverbs. In the small talk which preceded each meeting with Zhao and then with Deng himself, she engaged with diplomatic zeal in the agonising small talk which filled the time while the pictures were taken. Was London fog worse than Peking fog? Was that painting of the Yellow River or the Yangtze? She really seemed to care.

In the talks themselves, she evidently played the poker game with the right straight face, and at first there were no problems. When talking about the Soviet Union, Thatcher and

Zhao could engage in extravagant condemnation of hegemonism. Poland? Afghanistan? The Middle East? Nothing to disagree about. But then came Hong Kong, and this is where the Western and Eastern versions of Margaret Thatcher came into inevitable collision—with results that no one can foresee.

IT HAPPENED at the final press conference on Friday night, as it was bound to. Deng and Mrs Thatcher had agreed a statement, of minimal length and content. It said that talks would continue, with the common aim of maintaining the stability and prosperity of Hong Kong.

Eastern opacity prescribed that no further elaboration should be given. This, naturally, was Deng's option. Western democracy required that a press conference be held. Mrs Thatcher faced the biggest one in the history of modern China, dominated by the Hong Kong media, who were allowed in for a rare visit to Peking, but with the entire globe amply represented.

She tried to reconcile the Eastern and Western rules by sticking rigidly to the statement. She said, in effect, and over and over again: "Take it as it stands, in all its obscurity. Read into it what you like. I will say no more." Thus, somehow,

were the no-nonsense Westminster politician and the subtly mysterious Eastern traveller meant to resolve themselves into a single person.

Not surprisingly, it did not work. There are some situations where the unanswered question—how ever sweetly repelled, with references to the virtues of confidentiality—provides no safe haven. Declining to express confidence in the future of Hong Kong may be an honourable way of scrupulously standing by the statement. But it happens to do nothing for confidence in Hong Kong, which is the purpose of the exercise.

Mrs Thatcher performed as if on one of her better days at Parliamentary question time, playing a dead bat to the entire Labour front bench. It was not quite appropriate to the febrile bear-garden of the Hong Kong press—and the Stock Exchange behind them.

Talks will now continue through "diplomatic channels." They will be urgent, "much more intense, much more speeded-up than before"—which raises another oddity about this trip, and another question.

Mrs Thatcher has brought only a small party with her. Downing Street was pleased to be "travelling light". But among the heavier baggage left behind was the foreign secretary, Francis Pym.

This was always strange.

How Peking's official news agency recorded last Wednesday's historic moment. The Chinese caption reads: "The evening of 22 September Premier Zhao Ziyang, at a banquet in the Great Hall of the People, Peking, welcomes British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and her husband Denis."

The Hong Kong negotiation is going to be extremely complex, even though the parties have a powerful common interest. It could have great political repercussions, as the truth dawns on the electorate about the implications of these complexities.

Normally in such circumstances, the prime minister opens the talks, with the foreign secretary standing by to carry them forward. Not least among the reasons why Mr Pym is elsewhere and unable to play this role is the serious antipathy between him and the prime minister. Had Lord Carrington still been there, it is unlikely, I am told on excellent authority, that he would not have come. But as a travelling companion, Pym is persona non grata, just as the foreign office as a whole remains beyond the pale after the Falklands.

This trip should have changed some of that. It was the foreign office, after all, which educated Mrs Thatcher in the importance of Eastern thinking. They may be wets and compromisers, but she owes them quite a lot. And they owe her something, as they will readily admit out here in Tokyo and Peking, for putting Britain on the diplomatic map by seeing the Falklands through. Might this be the moment for a reconciliation?

Certainly, she has set up the need for one. Hong Kong, as we will learn, has many resonances. They could defeat the best intentions. China asserts her sovereignty over the whole colony. The lease on only part of it, the New Territories, expires in 1997. Britain does not deny this, but does she plan to surrender Kowloon and Hong Kong Island as well?

If so—as most people think must happen—how does that square with the Falklands? Are Hong Kongers not "Our people" as well? Mrs Thatcher said on Friday that she took responsibility for them. What does this mean? For the economy? For investment? For the millions who have made a good thing out of the place by sheer hard work?

Where, in short, will the smart money go? Ensconced in an armchair reserved for him at the press conference was, inevitably, Sir Y. K. Pao. I passed him as he was leaving. As his chauffeur put him into his ancient Soviet limousine, I could detect no message in his face; but he must be worried. The two sides are obviously miles apart. Yesterday Mrs Thatcher named a ship for him in Shanghai. But if I were him, I would be seeing a whole lot of expensive mischief ahead.

EDUCATION

Timing the teachers

DO STATE comprehensives spend too much time on arts and crafts? And do public schools sacrifice science for



"SIR, WHAT IS THE LATIN FOR PRIMEOUTS?"

WILDLIFE

AS autumn's gales begin to lash the northern Scottish islands, peace, of a sort, has returned to Fair Isle. A dispute that has been simmering away for the past five years is dying down for the season. But next summer, it now seems cer-

Feathers fly on

flock to the island each summer in pursuit of them. To the bird world, Fair Isle is Mecca. But there are 70 non-believers on the island, and Holy War is breaking out.

"The basic problem is that