

News Chinese state visit

A welcome so friendly even the

Nothing was left to chance in Britain's courting of the Chinese president and his wife, **Valentine Low** writes

As he revelled in the pomp and pageantry of a state visit, from the marching bands of the ceremonial welcome to the glittering royal feast of the banquet at Buckingham Palace, President Xi might have stopped for a moment to ponder the difference between a Communist dictatorship and a constitutional monarchy.

Better carriages in a monarchy, to be sure. But what they have in common is a way of making sure that the troublesome voices of dissent do nothing to spoil the official celebrations when there are deals to be signed and official bonds to be forged.

On the first day of his visit with his wife, Peng Liyuan, the head of China's Communist party would have been all but unaware of the protests from Tibetan campaigners as they were drowned out by the massed chants of pro-Chinese government supporters. And if any of his official contacts were so undiplomatic as to raise the vexing questions of steel dumping, or controversial nuclear deals, or human rights, they did so behind closed doors. Instead



The Queen makes final preparations for the Buckingham Palace banquet

the day in which David Cameron has invested so much was magnificently choreographed, perfectly staged, and a seamless example of the flummery and ritual that foreign guests expect when Britain rolls out the red carpet — even if they are Communists.

It began with a ceremonial welcome at Horse Guards Parade, where the visitors were formally greeted by the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh, and ended with a state banquet where the Duchess of Cambridge all but stole the show in a glittering tiara.

Earlier, the visitors had been welcomed at the Mandarin Oriental hotel in Knightsbridge by the Prince of Wales — whose views on human rights abuses in Tibet have not made him a friend of China — and the Duchess of Cornwall.

If Charles, who for reasons that remain still without official explanation was the only one of the Queen's children not to attend the banquet, harboured any resentment at having to consort with men whose predecessors he once described as "appalling old waxworks", he did his best to keep his feelings to himself. He entertained the president and his wife to tea at Clarence House and after a lunch at Buckingham Palace was seen talking amicably to the Chinese ambassador, Liu Xiaoming.

At their one-to-one meeting at Clarence House, President Xi even had kind words for Charles, praising his efforts to preserve Chinese culture. "We would like to express our appreciation," he said through an interpreter.

As the official welcome began, a 41-gun salute was fired in Green Park by

the King's Troop Royal Horse Artillery, and another salute at the Tower of London by the Honourable Artillery Company: muffled noises that could just about be heard on Horse Guards, which was more than could be said for the anti-China protesters.

After shaking hands, the Queen and the duke introduced the couple — the president in a dark suit and blue tie, Mrs Peng in a glamorous white suit and four-inch heels — to a line of VIPs, from dignitaries in uniforms and plumed hats to David Cameron and Theresa May, the home secretary.

Mrs May had thoughtfully chosen to dress almost entirely in red, which is regarded as a highly auspicious colour in Chinese: red hat, red dress, red bag, red shoes and, of course, red lipstick. The Grenadier Guards were also dressed in red, but then again they always are.

The captain of the honour guard, Major Benjamin Jesty, invited the president to inspect the guard, telling him in his best Mandarin: "The Guard of Honour of 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards is present, formed up and ready for your inspection, sir."

The president looked inscrutable: his wife seemed tickled by the officer's language efforts. A Chinese observer said: "It was very good Mandarin. He has practised very well."

Though the provenance of Mrs Peng's suit was as yet unknown, it was most likely the work of Ma Ke, her personal designer since 2003 and a graduate of Central Saint Martins in London. The Chinese, naturally, loved the pageantry. As they were driven off to Buckingham Palace in their carriages and landaus, delighted officials peered out to wave at the television cameras. As the man from the Chinese embassy said, with a broad smile upon his face: "That was the most exciting moment in my diplomatic career."

Then it was off to the palace for lunch, with the Queen and the president in the Diamond Jubilee State Coach, and the duke and Mrs Peng following behind in the Australian State Coach, the duke diligently pointing out the sights while Mrs Peng smiled gamely. At the palace the couple exchanged gifts, with the president giving the Queen two of his wife's albums. Mrs Peng, 52, was a famous folk singer with the People's Liberation Army long before her husband became a well-known politician. Mr Xi also gave the Queen an embroidery, a porcelain dish, a woodcarving and a stamp booklet.

At the banquet, guests dined on turbot and venison in the palace ballroom and heard the Queen and the president exchange flattering remarks about each other's great nations.

The Queen wore a white tulle banquet dress in harlequin design, embroidered with white and silver beads and diamante sequins, with a belt made with lace and diamond crystals. It was designed by Angela Kelly, inspired by Norman Hartnell.

The Duchess of Cambridge, who was attending her first state banquet, wore a bespoke red gown by Jenny Packham and the Lotus Flower tiara. It was only the third time she has worn a tiara in public. She borrowed the same tiara from the Queen two years ago to wear to the annual diplomatic reception at Buckingham Palace.

Only two people could have sounded a jarring note. However, Prince Charles was nowhere to be seen and Jeremy Corbyn was safely tucked away halfway down the table where he could not cause any trouble.

Nothing was left to chance. Mr Cameron must have been very pleased — and Mr Xi very impressed.



Communist rally drowns out dissent

Sean O'Neill, Kaya Burgess

China staged a Communist party rally in the heart of London yesterday to welcome president Xi Jinping and drown out human rights protesters demonstrating against his visit.

At least 20,000 people — most of them Chinese students at British universities — lined The Mall waving flags and red banners to cheer the Chinese leader as his state carriage procession made its way to Buckingham Palace.

The flags, along with "I Love China" T-shirts and baseball caps, were distributed by Chinese officials who also marshalled the crowd, organising singing, dancing and chanting. *The Times* saw dozens of boxes of Chinese propaganda

material at a distribution point behind the George VI memorial. Marked "Stop. Do not open or detain. Diplomatic Bag", the boxes had been flown in by the courier firm DHL and were labelled for delivery to the Chinese embassy in Portland Place.

On previous visits China has complained about the presence of anti-Chinese demonstrations. This time it decided to dwarf protests from Free Tibet, the Falun Gong religious group and Amnesty International with huge numbers of its own supporters. At one point, when the Tibet group chanted its slogans, China supporters

began drumming, waving their much larger flags and introducing Chinese dragons to the scene. G4S, the security firm, said 30 staff had been recruited to provide "personal protection" to staff from the British-Chinese law firm Christine Lee & Co, whose founder is the chief legal adviser to the Chinese embassy in London. The law firm said it had assisted community groups who wanted to attend and wanted to ensure that rival groups were segregated.

Free Tibet claimed that an advertising van it had hired had been stopped by police and the driver told its message was "too sensitive". Scotland Yard later said it was "an isolated incident" and "unreflective of the policing strategy".

Shao Jiang, a survivor of the Tiananmen Square massacre, who was on The Mall, said: "The Chinese government always tries to mobilise young people for propaganda. I think the embassy provided the flags, T-shirts and stickers."

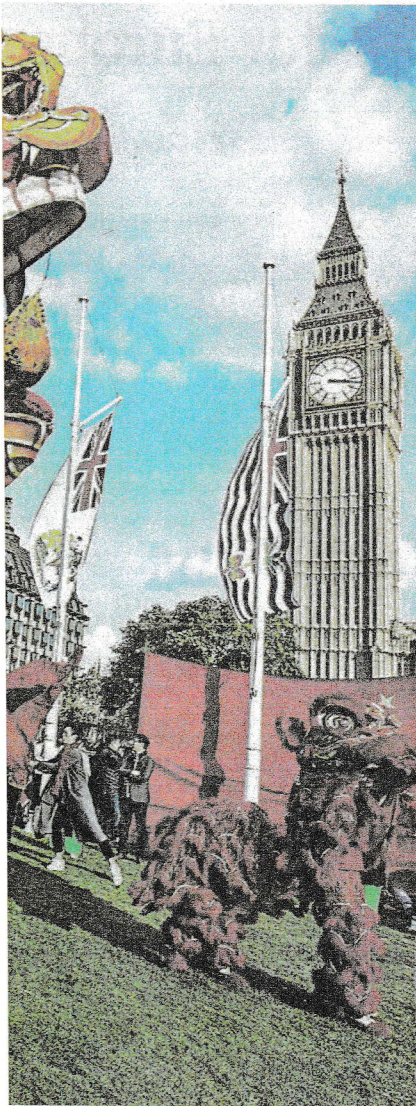
Xi Jinping: TIBETANS are dying for FREEDOM



Tibetan protestors were no match for the Chinese

honour guard spoke Mandarin

TIMES PHOTOGRAPHER RICHARD POWELL; TONY MELVILLE/REUTERS; DOMINIC LIPKOWITZ/PA; TUI WONG/PA



Rallies in support of the Chinese leader at Westminster countered the protests; a Mandarin-speaking officer presented the honour guard; in the exchange of gifts, the Queen was given two albums by Peng Liyuan, from her time as a singer; the president also had a meeting with Jeremy Corbyn



Exclusive

Audio dispatch
How Xi Jinping reached the top

thetimes.co.uk/asia



Queen puts in a word for people of Hong Kong

Francis Elliott Political Editor
Valentine Low

The Queen balanced praise for China at the state banquet for its president last night with a reminder of its obligations to protect Hong Kong's status under the terms of the 1997 handover.

President Xi used his address to parliament to deliver a rebuff to human rights critics and a coded dig at Britain's decline on the world stage.

David Cameron will announce today that Britain is to cut the cost of repeat-visit visas for Chinese tourists in the latest effort to deepen ties with Beijing.

The leaders begin two days of talks at Downing Street and Chequers today with a nuclear power deal between Britain and China ready to be disclosed.

The first day of the four-day state visit was mostly ceremonial, but both guests and hosts slipped political points between the diplomatic niceties.

In her address at Buckingham Palace, the Queen praised the former Chinese president Deng Xiaoping for his agreement to allow Hong Kong to retain its own administration under Chinese sovereignty. That will be welcomed by pro-democracy campaigners who say that the "one country, two systems" deal is being eroded.

The banquet also marked the first occasion that Jeremy Corbyn, an avowed republican, met the Queen. Mr Corbyn was in the line-up of guests to shake the hands of the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh at the start of the banquet.

It was not known whether Mr Corbyn, who was wearing an ill-fitting white-tie suit, bowed to the Queen.

In his meeting with Mr Xi, Mr Corbyn raised human rights abuses and the impact on the British steel industry of state-subsidised steel from China.

Earlier John Bercow, the Speaker of the Commons, praised the Burmese politician Aung San Suu Kyi, a veiled reference to China's repression of democracy campaigners, as he introduced Mr Xi.

For his part the Chinese leader laced warm words over the increasing "interdependence" between London and Beijing with a rebuff to those professing the supremacy of democracy. He said Britain's parliament was the oldest in the world but added "in China the concept of putting people first, following the rule of law, emerged in ancient times — about 4,000 years ago".

In remarks interpreted as a reminder of Britain's declining power, he said: "The ancient Chinese believed no country will stay strong or weak forever. He who abides by the law will make a country strong while he who fails to do so will make a country weak."

Mr Cameron and George Osborne, the chancellor, are banking on a flood of Chinese investment to plug the gap left by the five-year austerity drive. As part of the attraction to Chinese tourists, the price of a two-year multiple-visit UK visa will be cut from £324 to £85, the present cost of a six-month visa. Numbers of Chinese tourists have more than doubled from 89,000 in 2009 to 185,000 last year. The visitors spend an average of £2,688 per head during their trips.

Asked for moral inspiration, Xi gave us Marvin Gaye

Patrick Kidd
Political Sketch

The Queen wanted her guests out of the house while she cooked dinner, so Xi Jinping and his entourage were sent down The Mall to speak to what he called "the cream of society".

This could have been a mistranslation, since scum also floats on the surface and Mandarin may use the same word for all I know. In any case, he applied it to the parliamentarians who had gathered to hear his wisdom.

The great and the good were all there, earls and pearls, bishops and backbenchers, chattering away

cheerfully as they waited. "Who is the Chinese president?" "No, Hu was his predecessor, this is Xi."

The prime minister swept in, shadowed step for step by Alan Mak, the first MP of Chinese heritage, who has a reputation as a bit of a toady. Jeremy Corbyn soon followed, wearing a granola jacket. It seemed like a very British occasion. There was even the whiff of burnt crumpets. Perhaps it was the loyal toast.

Suddenly a fanfare of trumpets and then a lengthy pause, followed by the apologetic late entry of Lord Steel of Aikwood. Was this what Mr Cameron had meant when he promised to have a word with Xi about the Steel crisis? Maybe the former Liberal leader wasn't sure if he'd make it on time and had asked them to wait.

Finally, though, Xi arrived,

accompanied by what seemed like a hundred attendants, like some potentate in a Gilbert and Sullivan opera. Back at Buckingham Palace, the Queen was probably wondering whether she had bought enough potatoes.

John Bercow gave a short and pointed introduction, saying that "four prominent daughters and sons of Asia" — it made him sound a bit like Aslan — have come to parliament in the past three years, including Aung San Suu Kyi. So don't go thinking that you're special, mate.

He then advised Xi to be "a moral inspiration to the world", which will have gone down badly in the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, who don't like people to talk about China and human rights. Xi was just as courteously pointed in his reply. "Being here gives me a feeling of

going back in time," he said. "In China the concept of putting the people first emerged 4,000 years ago." Take that, Simon de Montfort.

He extended the hand of friendship, or at least the incentive of trade deals, with an address that drew attention to the shared links between our countries and featured contributions from William Shakespeare, Francis Bacon and the Beijing equivalent of Marvin Gaye.

"As we Chinese say: a mountain can never be too high, nor an ocean too deep," Xi said. Ain't no river wide enough either, he may have added, so long as you keep chucking us contracts to rebuild your creaking infrastructure.

Then it was back to the palace for cocktails and canapés before dinner, while Mr Corbyn shuffled off, maybe in search of someone who would show him how to tie a bow tie.