

China's "Diplomacy of Anger" Towards the United States in the Xi Jinping Era—A Communication Strategy or a Tool of Cognitive Warfare? The Case Studies of Taiwan and Tibet*

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Abstract

This paper investigates the role of China's "diplomacy of anger" in its relations with the United States during the Xi Jinping era. It is based on the premise that Beijing deliberately displays anger on the international stage to advance its strategic objectives, particularly regarding issues it considers politically and ideologically sensitive. The study addresses two central research questions: a) Is China's diplomacy of anger a communicative strategy designed to sensitize the United States and the broader international community to the core tenets of Beijing's ideological worldview? Or, b) Does it function primarily as a component of cognitive warfare—intended to generate anxiety and fear among other governments and international actors concerning the potential repercussions of Chinese anger, thereby pressuring them to accommodate Beijing's preferred vision of international order? To explore these questions, the paper

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employs case studies of Taiwan and Tibet, examining whether Beijing's reactions to perceived offenses in both contexts follow a consistent emotional script. In doing so, it evaluates whether a coherent and unified emotional strategy underpins China's diplomatic conduct across different issues, despite the distinct political and ideological roles that Taiwan and Tibet occupy on Beijing's strategic map.

Key words: Diplomacy of anger, Emotions, China, Taiwan, Tibet, the United States

1. Introduction

Since Xi Jinping assumed the presidency of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 2013, nationalist sentiment among the Chinese population has increased. This surge has been driven, on one hand, by state-led ideological campaigns—most notably the “Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation”—and, on the other, by the adoption of a more assertive and emotive foreign policy, embodied by the so-called “wolf warrior” diplomats. One of the most salient features of this coercive and confrontational diplomatic posture is the frequent use of emotionally charged rhetoric and actions—particularly expressions of anger—in response to perceived foreign provocations and affronts.

This rhetorical and behavioral assertiveness is especially pronounced in the context of China's deepening strategic rivalry with the United States—a bilateral relationship that has come to shape much of Beijing's foreign policy and its global ambitions in the Xi Jinping era. While China has long demonstrated sensitivity to external criticism concerning its sovereignty and domestic governance, President Xi's tenure seems to be marked by a significantly low threshold for perceived offenses—especially those originating from Washington. This heightened sensitivity reflects China's growing ambition to reshape the international order in ways that better reflect its own national interests, cultural values, and ideological worldview.

The United States seems to frequently provoke Beijing's ire, particularly when it engages with matters that the PRC defines as its “core interests.” In such instances, the Chinese government often eschews conventional diplomatic language in favor of heightened emotional and moralistic rhetoric, accusing Washington of crossing “red lines”¹ and “hurting the feelings of the Chinese people,”² while also displaying

¹ Antonina Luszczykiewicz and Patrick Mendis, “Beijing's Diplomacy of Anger at Taiwan: How the Chinese Art of War Avoids Red Lines” (2023/12/15), visited date: 2025/5/5, *《Australian Outlook》*, <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/beijings-diplomacy-of-anger-at-taiwan-how-the-chinese-art-of-war-avoids-red-lines/>.

² Antonina Luszczykiewicz-Mendis and Patrick Mendis, “The Odyssey of Hurt and Anger: China's ‘Emotional Diplomacy’” (2024/6/26), visited date: 2025/5/1, *《China Dialogues》*, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/cff/2024/06/26/the-odyssey-of-hurt-and-anger-chinas-emotional-diplomacy/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR0Bgy-4PLhS54QZfoW0nrM78vy3NBsz5zO3kpUZbSR9PY87WkbSenuvMO0aem_W6AdXYCCdscmsxmVvKO32w.

behaviors that signal indignation and grievance.

This paper examines China's "diplomacy of anger" directed toward the United States, its principal global rival. It seeks to assess whether such behavior functions primarily as a strategic communication tool—used to signal red lines and deter perceived transgressions—or whether it should be interpreted as a form of cognitive warfare aimed at reshaping international perceptions, instilling fear of potential retaliation, and enhancing Beijing's global prestige. Moreover, this study touches upon the internal dimensions of China's emotional diplomacy, investigating the extent to which these displays are calibrated for domestic consumption in order to foster nationalism and legitimize the authority of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

To address these issues, this paper focuses on two highly sensitive case studies—Taiwan and Tibet—through which China's emotional responses to US actions can be contextualized. While Taiwan and Tibet differ significantly in terms of geopolitical status and international visibility, both are portrayed by the PRC as inalienable parts of what Beijing defines as the "Chinese nation."³ Consequently, this paper inquires whether Beijing's expressions of anger toward the United States in these cases follow a coherent emotional and discursive logic.

2. "Diplomacy of Anger" as a Research Framework

Over the past few decades, the strategic role of emotions in political studies and international relations has garnered growing scholarly attention, particularly as some researchers have strived to move beyond rationalist paradigms and dismantle the long-standing dichotomy between emotion and reason.⁴ Once dismissed as irrational or

³ Xi Jinping, "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" (2017/10/18), visited date: 2025/5/23, 《China Daily》, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/19thcpnationalcongress/2017-11/04/content_34115212.htm.

⁴ Emma Hutchison and Roland Bleiker, "Theorizing Emotions in World Politics," *International Theory*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971914000232>.

secondary to material interests and institutional logic,⁵ emotions are now increasingly recognized as fundamental to political decision-making, driving both individual and collective behaviors.⁶

However, studying emotions in the context of statecraft and international affairs presents numerous methodological challenges. Most importantly, researchers typically have access only to the observable dimensions of emotions—such as facial expressions, body language, and physiological responses—rather than the internal, subjective experience of emotion itself. Even within these constraints, certain emotions pose greater analytical difficulties than others: for example, sadness, being more introspective and internally directed, is often less outwardly expressive than happiness,⁷ and is therefore more difficult to investigate empirically. This discrepancy further complicates the measurement and validation of emotional phenomena,⁸ particularly when examining emotions at the collective or institutional level.

Another important question concerns the emotionality of states: can states themselves experience emotions? Emotions are typically understood as complex phenomena involving bodily responses, feelings, and cognitive assessments;⁹ from this perspective, attributing emotions to states may appear problematic, as it involves a high degree of anthropomorphization. In other words, states tend to be attributed with human features, whereas in fact—as abstract political constructs—they lack the physiological and psychological mechanisms necessary to “feel” in the human sense.¹⁰ Therefore, one may claim that to speak of a state as experiencing anger, fear, or pride is not to describe

⁵ Jonathan Mercer, “Rationality and Psychology in International Politics,” *International Organization*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (2005), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818305050058>.

⁶ Yohan Ariffin, “Introduction: How Emotions Can Explain Outcomes in International Relations,” in Yohan Ariffin, Jean-Marc Coicaud, and Vesselin Popovski eds., *Emotions in International Politics: Beyond Mainstream International Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 3.

⁷ Jean-Marc Coicaud, “Emotions and Passions in the Discipline of International Relations,” *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1468109914000206>.

⁸ Roland Bleiker and Emma Hutchison, “Fear No More: Emotions and World Politics,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 34, No. S1 (2008), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210508007821>.

⁹ Coicaud, “Emotions and Passions in the Discipline of International Relations.”

¹⁰ Emma Hutchison, *Affective Communities in World Politics: Collective Emotions after Trauma* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. xii.

an internal emotional state, but rather to use metaphorical language that ascribes human qualities to a collective entity.

To address this challenge, a rationalist-oriented strand within the study of emotions in political science and international relations proposes that states, although incapable of “feeling” emotions, can nonetheless display, produce, and institutionalize them.¹¹ From this perspective, emotions are not necessarily authentic or spontaneous, but rather politically constructed responses strategically deployed to achieve specific objectives. Emotional expressions in this context may be deliberately performed or “staged” to serve political purposes. University of Oxford professor Todd Hall conceptualized this phenomenon as “emotional diplomacy”—a form of state behavior in which emotional displays are coordinated and instrumentalized to convey intentions, mobilize domestic or international support, and influence the actions of other global actors.¹² For a state’s conduct to qualify as emotional diplomacy, three core features must be present: collectivity, coordination, and strategy.¹³ In other words, the display must reflect a unified and goal-oriented state response, articulated consistently by key political actors—ranging from senior officials and foreign ministry spokespeople to state-controlled media.

Just like in individual humans’ behavior, states may apply a wide range of emotions, both positive ones (joy, pride) as well as negative ones (shame, guilt). One of the most conspicuous is anger, projected to dramatize perceived violations of sovereignty or dignity and warn others of potential consequences.

One of the key aspects of the “diplomacy of anger” is the immediacy and intensity of the response, which signals the seriousness with which the offending action is viewed.¹⁴ Despite its emotive force, however, this form of diplomacy does not necessarily seek to escalate conflict; rather, it operates within carefully managed

¹¹ Neta C. Crawford, “Institutionalizing Passion in World Politics: Fear and Empathy,” *International Theory*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971914000256>.

¹² Todd H. Hall, *Emotional Diplomacy: Official Emotion on the International Stage* (Cornell University Press, 2015), pp. viii.

¹³ Hall, *Emotional Diplomacy: Official Emotion on the International Stage*, pp. 2-3.

¹⁴ Hall, *Emotional Diplomacy: Official Emotion on the International Stage*, p. 4.

boundaries that allow for symbolic retaliation while preserving space for future reconciliation. This way, the diplomacy of anger can actually serve to defuse tension by channeling outrage through non-military means.

China represents a paradigmatic example of this diplomatic strategy. First, Beijing's reactions to perceived offences are consistently collective and coordinated, echoed in statements by high-ranking officials, foreign ministry spokespeople, and editorials in state-controlled media outlets. Second, anger is expressed through symbolic actions that reinforce rhetorical condemnation: the cancellation of official visits or dialogues, the organization of orchestrated protests, and, in extreme instances, the initiation of military drills.¹⁵

It may thus be argued that behind China's emotions—or rather, its performed emotionality—lies a carefully calibrated rationality. Not all scholars may agree with this view—for instance, Kerry Brown of King's College in London argued in his 2013 article in *The Diplomat* that China is behaving irrationally, driven by historical traumas and collective sentiments.¹⁶ According to Brown, these emotional forces have led Beijing to pursue “Chinese diplomacy with emotional characteristics,” often at the expense of its own interests, particularly economic ones.

While the CCP leadership may indeed be motivated by such factors, the framework of the diplomacy of anger allows for a more nuanced interpretation. This perspective suggests that Chinese leaders strategically deploy emotional expressions—such as anger—not as impulsive reactions, but as tools to signal red lines, shape the behavior of other states, and maintain control over escalating tensions.

This strategic emotionality is particularly evident in Beijing's interactions with the United States. When China expresses anger, even through dramatic means such as large-scale military drills, it does so with the deliberate intent of avoiding direct military confrontation. In other words, these drills, while visually and symbolically aggressive, are in fact tightly controlled performances designed to convey resolve without

¹⁵ Hall, *Emotional Diplomacy: Official Emotion on the International Stage*, p.50.

¹⁶ Kerry Brown, “Chinese Diplomacy with Emotional Characteristics” (2013/8/20), visited date: 2025/5/23, *The Diplomat*, <https://thediplomat.com/2013/08/chinese-diplomacy-with-emotional-characteristics/>.

provoking accidental conflict with the US or Taiwanese forces. Even during highly sensitive episodes—such as US Speaker Nancy Pelosi's controversial visit to Taiwan in 2022—China's response, though vocally and visually intense, did not escalate into direct military engagement. This underscores the performative and calculated nature of Beijing's displays of outrage, which are carefully managed to avoid uncontrolled escalation while still communicating strategic messages.

3. Beijing's "Diplomacy of Anger" Related to Taiwan and Tibet: Historical Overview

Undoubtedly, Taiwan and Tibet differ significantly in their current political status and strategic importance; however, both provoke similarly intense emotional and diplomatic responses from Beijing whenever its territorial claims are believed to be challenged by foreign actors.

It seems that Taiwan—or, rather, the Republic of China (ROC)—occupies a more volatile and geopolitically urgent place in China's strategic calculus. A democratically self-ruled island, Taiwan is the "final" yet still "missing" piece in Beijing's national (re)unification project.¹⁷ Therefore, its symbolic significance renders it a red-line issue for the CCP as it may be perceived as an ultimate test for the Party's legitimacy, both domestically and in the eyes of the world community.

Tibet, by contrast, is a more settled issue from Beijing's internal governance perspective, having been incorporated into the PRC since the early 1950s. However, the region remains symbolically and ideologically sensitive: international engagements with the Dalai Lama, expressions of support for Tibetan autonomy, or critiques of Beijing's human rights violations in the region continue to provoke angry responses from the

¹⁷ Applying the term "reunification" rather than simply "unification"—with the prefix re- implying that Taiwan has always been part of historical China—is itself a form of narrative manipulation. See more: Antonina Luszczykiewicz and Patrick Mendis, "Taiwan's Participation in International Organizations: The Current Position of Poland and Its Possible Ways of Supporting Taipei" (2023/2), visited date: 2025/5/21, *《Uniwersytet Warszawski》*, <https://wnpism.uw.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Taiwan-Report-on-Poland-and-IOs-by-Luszczykiewicz-and-Mendis-February-2023.pdf>, pp. 41-42.

Chinese government. Although Tibet does not pose a near-term geopolitical threat, it remains a potent symbol of China's territorial and ethnic unity.

Beijing's deployment of diplomatic anger in relation to Taiwan and Tibet has a long-standing historical lineage that predates the Xi Jinping era. Numerous instances of coordinated emotive responses reveal a consistent behavioral pattern rooted in Beijing's commitment to defending its territorial integrity and asserting national dignity.

One of the most notable examples was China's reaction to Washington's support for Taiwan's first democratic presidential election in 1996. As analyzed by Hall, Beijing perceived both the election and American diplomatic gestures as direct challenges to its One China principle.¹⁸ The ensuing missile tests and bellicose rhetoric marked the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis and constituted an emotionally charged assertion of China's territorial claims. However, despite the rhetorical intensity, Beijing deliberately avoided direct military engagement—underscoring its preference for symbolic assertiveness over kinetic confrontation as well as preserving space for a subsiding of tensions.

A slightly different dynamic emerged in 2007 when the United States awarded the Congressional Gold Medal to the Dalai Lama. China's response was immediate: the Foreign Ministry condemned the award as a “blatant interference” in China's internal affairs, denouncing the Dalai Lama as a political figure engaged in “splitting the motherland” under the guise of religion.¹⁹ At the same time, Beijing postponed unrelated bilateral negotiations concerning sanctions on Iran.²⁰ This multifaceted reaction demonstrates how China's diplomacy of anger is often leveraged to apply pressure across multiple diplomatic domains.

Another emblematic case occurred during the 2008 Olympic torch relay in Paris, when a pro-Tibet activist attempted to seize the torch from Jin Jing, a wheelchair-bound Chinese Paralympian. The incident, which was widely circulated in Chinese media,

¹⁸ Antonina Luszczykiewicz and Patrick Mendis, “Taiwan's Participation in International Organizations: The Current Position of Poland and Its Possible Ways of Supporting Taipei,” p. 72.

¹⁹ “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Liu Jianchao's Regular Press Conference on 18 October 2007,” visited date: 2025/5/23, *《Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the State of Qatar》*, http://qa.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/fyrth/200710/t20071019_1423186.htm.

²⁰ “China cancels Iran meeting over Dalai Lama” (2007/10/15), visited date: 2025/5/23, *《Reuters》*, <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/china-cancels-iran-meeting-over-dalai-lama-idUSN15376249/>.

provoked a powerful wave of nationalistic outrage—Beijing even encouraged Chinese citizens to protest and boycott French products, escalating the issue into a diplomatic scandal.²¹ Christopher Primiano interprets the Chinese government's response—including its symbolic retaliation against France—as a textbook example of strategic emotional diplomacy: by framing the event as a moral affront to Chinese dignity and sovereignty, Beijing capitalized on public sentiment to consolidate domestic unity and reaffirm its red lines.²²

4. Beijing's Anger in the Xi Jinping Era

Among the most significant demonstrations of China's "diplomacy of anger" under President Xi was the government's response to the US Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in August 2022. Despite repeated and direct warnings from Beijing—including the one reportedly made by Xi during a phone call with President Joe Biden²³—Pelosi proceeded with her trip. Although her visit was not entirely unprecedented (as Speaker Newt Gingrich had visited Taipei in 1997), the geopolitical context under Xi's leadership made Beijing's reaction especially intense.

One of the most dramatic elements of China's response was the live-fire military exercises conducted by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in multiple zones around Taiwan, effectively simulating a blockade. This military demonstration was accompanied by highly aggressive rhetoric from Chinese officials, who accused the United States of "playing with fire."²⁴ *Xinhua*, the official news agency of China, labeled Pelosi's "provocative visit" as reflection of Washington's "hegemonic nature

²¹ "Anti-French Protests Sweep across China" (2008/4/19), visited date: 2025/5/20, *France24*, <https://www.france24.com/en/20080419-anti-french-protests-sweep-across-china-china-france>.

²² Christopher B. Primiano, "Let's Get Emotional: The Strategic Use of Emotions in China's Foreign Policy," *East Asia*, Vol. 35 (2018), pp. 197-214, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12140-018-9296-3>.

²³ Vincent Ni and Joan E. Greve, "Xi Jinping tells Joe Biden not to 'play with fire' over Taiwan in two-hour call" (2022/7/29), visited date: 2025/5/23, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/28/xi-jinping-tells-joe-biden-not-to-play-with-fire-over-taiwan-in-two-hour-call>.

²⁴ Steve Holland, Michael Martina and Ryan Woo, "Don't 'play with fire' over Taiwan, China's Xi warns in call with Biden" (2022/7/29), visited date: 2025/5/23, *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/world/biden-looks-tamp-down-taiwan-tension-during-china-xi-call-2022-07-28/>.

and gangster logic.”²⁵ In addition to military maneuvers, Beijing suspended several communication channels with Washington, including defense and climate talks. However, despite the scope and intensity of the response, China avoided direct military confrontation with the US forces, thereby signaling that its outrage, though fierce, was primarily performative and strategically constrained.

Interestingly, however, China has not always responded as vehemently during Xi’s tenure as in case of Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan. For instance, in 2016, following then-President-elect Donald Trump’s phone call with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen, Beijing issued a negative response, but refrained from expressing overt anger. The Chinese Foreign Ministry reaffirmed Beijing’s commitment to the One China principle and lodged a formal protest; however, it also urged Washington to handle Taiwan-related matters in a “discreet manner” to avoid “unnecessary disruptions to the overall China–US relationship.”²⁶ Although Trump’s direct conversation with the Taiwanese president constituted a clear breach of diplomatic protocol, Beijing’s reaction was notably restrained—particularly when contrasted with its response to Speaker Pelosi’s later visit to Taiwan. This more moderate approach may have reflected a strategic decision by Beijing to preserve room for maneuver in its relationship with the incoming US administration. The episode also illustrates that expressions of anger in diplomacy are calculated and goal-oriented; equally, restraint may be employed when it better serves a state’s strategic interests.

As underlined earlier, Tibet’s position vis-à-vis Beijing differs considerably from that of Taiwan. Notably, even the Dalai Lama himself has publicly acknowledged Tibet as part of China, although he has consistently advocated for respecting its autonomy within the Chinese state—a principle nominally guaranteed by Beijing in 1965.²⁷

²⁵ “Some Facts About Pelosi’s Visit to Taiwan” (2022/8/25), visited date: 2025/5/23, 《Xinhua》, <https://english.news.cn/20220825/2577e1f1bc994fdbbceec55d7dd8a8fa8/c.html>.

²⁶ “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Geng Shuang’s Remarks on US President-elect Trump’s Phone Call with Taiwan leader Tsai Ing-wen” (2016/12/3), visited date: 2025/5/20, 《Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People’s Republic of China》, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/xw/fyrbt/fyrbt/202405/t20240530_11349515.html.

²⁷ Antonina Luszczykiewicz-Mendis, “Chinese Water Projects in Tibet: A ‘Continental Challenge’ ” (2025/2/3), visited date: 2025/5/30, 《Institute for Security and Development Policy》, <https://www.isdp.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Brief-Antonina-Feb-3.pdf>, p. 4.

Nevertheless, in the Xi Jinping era, Chinese authorities have remained deeply sensitive to any foreign actions perceived as supporting Tibetan separatism or questioning the legitimacy of Chinese governance in the region.

A recurring source of diplomatic tension has been the US government's engagement with the Dalai Lama, whom Beijing routinely describes as a "separatist" and "theocrat."²⁸ In 2014, President Barack Obama hosted the Dalai Lama at the White House despite explicit warnings from Beijing. China's Foreign Ministry urged the US to cancel the meeting, condemning it as a "gross interference in China's internal affairs" and "a serious violation of the norms of international relations" that would "seriously damage Sino-US relations."²⁹

This pattern of emotionally charged protest resurfaced in June 2017, when the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) invited the Dalai Lama to deliver its commencement address and awarded him an honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters. The decision provoked an immediate and hostile response from Chinese officials and state media. The Global Times, a prominent state-affiliated newspaper, warned that the university chancellor's decision to invite the Dalai Lama "will affect his personal and the university's exchanges with China,"³⁰ while nationalist Chinese student groups organized protests on campus. Ultimately, however, Chinese students and scholars were the ones to bear the consequences: the China Scholarship Council, under the authority of China's Ministry of Education, informed that it would no longer fund Chinese citizens to study at UCSD.³¹

Another increasingly sensitive area in the Xi era involves the strategic significance

²⁸ James Smith, "The West Creates 'Cult of Personality' around Dalai Lama to Smear China" (2023/4/25), visited date: 2025/5/23, *《Global Times》*, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202304/1289771.shtml>.

²⁹ "China Slams Obama's Dalai Lama Meeting as 'A Gross Interference'" (2014/2/21), visited date: 2025/5/23, *《France24》*, <https://www.france24.com/en/20140221-china-obama-dalai-lama-meeting-gross-interference>.

³⁰ Liu Jianxi, "US University Fails to Teach Students Correct History of Tibet" (2017/6/20), visited date: 2025/5/23, *《Global Times》*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170620185314/https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1052694.shtml>.

³¹ "Tibet: Controversy amongst Chinese Students at the Dalai Lama's Visit" (2017/9/22), visited date: 2025/5/23, *《Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization》*, <https://unpo.org/tibet-controversy-amongst-chinese-students-at-the-dalai-lama%E2%82%AC%E2%82%BDs-visit/>.

of Tibet's natural resources—particularly its freshwater reserves. As concerns over climate change and transboundary rivers continue to intensify, the United States has occasionally called for greater transparency in Beijing's management of river systems originating in Tibet that supply water to neighboring countries in South and Southeast Asia.³² In response, Chinese state-run media have accused Washington of politicizing environmental issues to undermine China's sovereignty: they asserted that “forces in the West, particularly the US, are weaponizing the so-called environmental issue to smear China's sovereignty over Tibet” and accused them of “colluding with the Dalai Lama clique to internationalize the Tibet issue under the guise of ecological protection.”³³

5. Comparative Analysis: Anger as a Mirror of CCP's Sensitivities and Strategic Projection

On the surface, Tibet and Taiwan appear to represent two very different issues in China's agenda. From Beijing's perspective, Taiwan constitutes an unresolved political dispute with its own independent government, strategic military relevance, and international (though often unofficial) support, particularly from the United States and other like-minded countries. Tibet, in contrast, is a region firmly under Chinese administrative control since the 1950s and, on paper, a “settled” matter within China's internal governance. Yet, despite these substantive differences, China's diplomatic reactions to perceived US interference in both cases are strikingly similar—anchored in an emotional register of indignation, victimhood, and moral rebuke.

In both cases, China accuses the United States of interfering in its internal affairs and supporting separatism. Beijing frames American engagement with Taiwan's government and with the Dalai Lama and Tibetan issues as breaches of sovereignty and assaults on Chinese national unity. Whether it is Nancy Pelosi's 2022 visit to Taipei or

³² Antonina Łuszczkiewicz-Mendis, “The Role of Tibet's Transboundary Water Resources in the US-China Rivalry,” *Prospect and Exploration Magazine*, Vol. 22, No. 12 (2024), p. 56.

³³ “Why Do the US and Dalai Lama Clique Smear China's Dam Operation and Water Resources Development on Qinghai Xizang Plateau?” (2023/10/9), visited date: 2025/5/30, 《Global Times》, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202310/1299528.shtml>.

the University of California's decision to honor the Dalai Lama in 2017, the Chinese government responds with coordinated and emotionally charged condemnation, often accompanied by punitive diplomatic or symbolic measures. Importantly, Beijing's performed anger is not confined to national governments—it extends to academic institutions, cultural events, and even environmental policy discussions.

These reactions reveal a deeper anxiety within the CCP: a fear that external actors are not only undermining its claims to territorial integrity but also challenging its political legitimacy. Taiwan and Tibet are two of the most symbolically loaded issues for the CCP, each tied to the narrative of national rejuvenation and the Party's historical role as the unifier and protector of Chinese territory. Emotional diplomacy, in the form of performative anger, allows Beijing to project strength and draw red lines, while simultaneously masking its internal insecurities.

This projection of anger is multifaceted. Internationally, it is meant to deter further engagement by signaling political costs and potential retaliation. It may be argued that Beijing seeks to infuse fear, discourage diplomatic overtures, and establish clear boundaries without escalating to military confrontation. Domestically, anger is used to stoke nationalism, portray the CCP as a vigilant defender of national interests, and demonstrate parity with the United States on the global stage.

Beijing's strategy is not limited to governmental rhetoric or official sanctions: it also includes orchestrated protests by student groups, social media campaigns targeting foreign institutions, and aggressive media narratives. Moreover, China's diplomacy of anger extends even to seemingly technocratic issues such as environmental governance: discussions over Tibet's transboundary water resources have elicited angry responses from Beijing, which accused the US of using "green politics" as a front for geopolitical interference. The invocation of the "Dalai Lama clique" in environmental disputes illustrates just how far-reaching and deeply entrenched China's sensitivity has become. It is not merely about high-level diplomacy or abstract principles of sovereignty—these sensitivities carry significant consequences for practical governance with real international implications.

Importantly, it should be emphasized that China is not inherently predisposed

to respond with anger; rather, the strategic deployment of anger as a tool of pressure and communication rests with the CCP leadership. Historical precedents demonstrate that the CCP leaders are equally capable of exhibiting restraint, opting to express dissatisfaction without resorting to overtly vehement reactions—a path that often triggers a cascade of rhetorical and behavioral escalations and necessitates time for tensions to de-escalate. Nonetheless, in the context of the ongoing trade war with the United States, it is likely that China may be more inclined to choose anger over restraint, particularly as it feels that its global standing and prestige are being challenged.

Ultimately, the consistency and breadth of China's diplomacy of anger—from military drills to diplomatic protests to media vitriol—underscore its importance as a strategic instrument. While Taiwan and Tibet occupy different places on China's geopolitical map, they are united by the CCP's need to safeguard legitimacy, manage domestic perceptions, and deter international engagement. Anger, in this context, is both a warning and a mask—a performance that defends red lines while concealing the vulnerabilities that lie behind them.

6. Conclusion

China's diplomacy of anger in the Xi Jinping era serves a dual function: it is both a strategic communication tool and a form of cognitive warfare. On one level, it is a calibrated instrument of statecraft, deployed to signal red lines, express discontent, and deter perceived transgressions by the United States and other like-minded countries. Through strongly worded diplomatic protests, military demonstrations, media campaigns, and a range of retaliations (from symbolic to economic ones),³⁴ Beijing seeks to communicate its boundaries without resorting to kinetic conflict. As a result, China's diplomacy of anger effectively raises the cost of engagement for foreign actors while projecting an image of resolve and national strength.

At the same time, China's diplomacy of anger functions as a tool of cognitive

³⁴ Antonina Luszczykiewicz and Patrick Mendis, "Taiwan's Participation in International Organizations: The Current Position of Poland and Its Possible Ways of Supporting Taipei," p. 17.

warfare. It is not merely reactive—it proactively shapes international narratives, instills caution among foreign governments and institutions, and asserts China's status as a global power. By targeting not only state actors but also universities, NGOs, journalists, and even environmental forums, Beijing blurs the lines between traditional diplomacy and psychological influence. The outrage expressed over Tibet's water resources or academic honors for the Dalai Lama illustrates how far China is willing to extend its narrative control, framing any critique or engagement as a threat to its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Crucially, the interplay between external signaling and internal legitimacy lies at the heart of this strategy. Internationally, Beijing aims to confront without escalation and to appear strong without entering direct military conflict. Domestically, however, diplomacy of anger reinforces the CCP's authority by portraying the Party as the vigilant guardian of national dignity against foreign hostility. It fuels nationalism, mobilizes public sentiment, and strengthens the narrative that the CCP is the only force capable of preserving China's unity and global standing.

Fundamentally, China's diplomacy of anger reveals a deeper anxiety within the CCP: the fear that challenges to its authority over Tibet and Taiwan constitute a fundamental threat to the Party's survival; hence, from Beijing's point of view, anger is more than strategy—it has become a necessity.