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**Review by Yafeng Xia, Long Island University**

Jixinge (Henry Kissinger in Chinese) has been a household name in China since 1971. He has visited China more than 40 times, and met with all Chinese top leaders from Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai to the current Chinese leader Hu Jintao. In China, Kissinger is known as a man of great wisdom. A quick check on the library holdings of Northeast Normal University in China shows a collection of more than 50 books by or on Kissinger published in Chinese, including the first two volumes of his memoirs (The third volume of his memoir, *Years of Renewal* has not yet been published in Chinese) and many of his books. There are also several biographies of Kissinger and doctoral dissertations on Kissinger in Chinese from many different Chinese universities.

While many books have been written about Kissinger, Jeremy Suri, a University of Wisconsin-Madison history professor, has more to tell us. This book is the first to offer a deeper understanding of Kissinger based on his remarkable life history starting with his birth and teenage years as a German Jew. Suri regards Kissinger as a man highly influenced and shaped by his experiences and circumstances “created for him by society at large.” His thesis is that Kissinger is not so much a great man as a “child of his times” (p. 55). It was the changing world around him—the Cold War and the United States’ increasing global reach—that provided a stage on which Kissinger succeeded. Drafted into the U.S. Army in early 1943, Kissinger served in counterintelligence in Europe during and just after World War II. His keen mind and familiarity with German society were crucial to his success. In 1946 with one year of night college in accounting, he was lecturing American officers on German society (p. 57). That was his entrée into Harvard and it sets his career on an
academic and political path that would never have been possible if he was from a non-Western cultural background (pp. 78-81). Suri contends, Kissinger’s “genius was not his originality, but his ability to recognize the changed circumstances around him and take advantage of them” (p. 55).

This book, in particular, examines how Kissinger’s Jewishness impacted the way he viewed the world and its threats. Growing up as a teenager in a setting of virulent anti-Semitism in Weimar and Nazi Germany, Kissinger “was consistently moved by a fear of democratic weakness and democratic violence.” Suri observes, “His experience from his earliest days in Weimar Germany through his time in office through his discussion of Iraq today are deeply motivated by a belief that democracies are not bad, but ‘weak’” (p. 8). Suri notes, “Kissinger’s policies reflected the accumulated wisdom and experience of his formative years. They were keyed to his early and lasting skepticism of democracy, his sense of cultural hierarchy, his faith in state power, and his fear of political chaos.” (p. 246). Despite the intense criticism of Kissinger’s legacy, critics have failed to offer a more effective foreign policy alternative. Suri concludes, “The 21st Century awaits Kissinger’s successor” (p. 274).

This book is well written, very insightful and original. It is a true effort of using multi-archival and multilingual sources in writing diplomatic history, and a significant contribution to the study of U.S. foreign relations during the Cold War in general and Henry Kissinger in particular. This book may serve as a supplementary reading for courses on modern diplomatic history and American foreign relations. The reviewer wants to bring up two points of disagreement on Kissinger and China to share with Suri and the readers:

The first issue is Kissinger’s role in initiating U.S.-China rapprochement in early months of the Nixon administration. Suri writes, “From his first months in office, Kissinger made a series of secret overtures to Beijing—many without Nixon’s knowledge—in hopes of creating a useful back channel” (p. 235). It appears to be an exaggeration of the role Kissinger played in achieving Sino-American rapprochement. At the outset of the new administration, it was by all accounts Nixon, not Kissinger, who seized the initiative on China.\(^1\) In direct contrast to his reputation as a bitter anti-communist cold warrior, Nixon made reconciliation with China an early and high priority.\(^2\) It was one of the subjects on his mind even during the transition period before he moved into the White House. Vernon Walters, who was then serving as the army attaché at the American embassy in Paris, called on Nixon at the Pierre Hotel in New York City. According to Walters’ memoirs, Nixon told him that “among the various things he hoped to do in office was to open the door to the Chinese Communists... He felt it was not good for the world to have the most populous nation on earth completely without contact with the most powerful nation on earth.”\(^3\) In his own memoirs, Nixon said that at the time he interviewed Kissinger for the job of national

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security adviser, he asked Kissinger to read his Foreign Affairs article and spoke to him of the need to reevaluate America’s China policy. At this time, Kissinger did not see any short-term likelihood of a move toward China. According to Harry R. Haldeman, Nixon’s chief of staff, when he told Kissinger on one early trip that Nixon “seriously intends to visit China before the end of the second term,” Kissinger responded sardonically, “Fat chance.” Suri’s sources also indicate that Kissinger started to play a more active role in secret U.S.-China communications only in early 1970 which was about a year after the Nixon administration took office.

The second issue is U.S.-China relations from Nixon’s visit to China to the end of the Ford administration. Suri writes, “Secret arrangements with figure like Zhou Enlai in China, Augusto Pinochet in Chile, and John Vorster in South Africa helped skirt what Kissinger perceived as the limits on American power, especially during a period of domestic turmoil” (p. 240). Suri writes, “the continued brutality of communist rule in China during the Nixon and Ford administrations” has much to do with Kissinger’s secret arrangements with Zhou Enlai (pp. 240-241). This is obviously contrary to the status of U.S.-China relations in those years. The U.S. government had very little influence on China’s domestic politics in the 1970s when Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai were in power. The same applies to post-Mao China. George H. W. Bush, who had cultivated close relations with senior Chinese leaders including Deng Xiaoping was not able to utilize any meaningful venue to pressure Beijing leaders in the midst of the Tiananmen Massacre in 1989.

Previous studies on Sino-American relations all confirm that Sino-American relations suffered “stagnation” and “complications” from the time of Nixon’s visit to China in 1972 to the time when the Carter administration decided to normalize relations with China in 1978. During Kissinger’s visit to China in February 1973, Zhou Enlai and Kissinger agreed that normalization of U.S.-China relations would be attained by a two-step process during Nixon’s second term. First, the two countries agreed to establish a liaison office in each other’s capital. The second phase was to achieve normalization of U.S.-China relations at the opportune moment. During his meeting with Kissinger on 17 February, Mao suggested that the United States and China should “work together to commonly deal with a bastard [the Soviet Union].” Mao also proposed his strategy of establishing “a horizontal line—the U.S.—Japan—Pakistan—Iran—Turkey and Europe” in order to jointly counter Soviet hegemony.

However, whether Mao Zedong’s view on U.S.-Soviet relations fitted to reality or not, his strategic design of “alliance with the U.S. to deter the Soviets,” “a horizontal line,” and “a big terrain” could not come to fruition. Mao was disheartened to see the frequent U.S.-Soviet summits and the subsequent signing of treaties in 1973. During Kissinger’s sixth visit to China (his first time as secretary of state) from 10-14 November 1973, in a meeting with

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Kissinger on 12 November, Mao came to realize that the U.S. was in a very advantageous position and no longer in dire need of the China card after its withdrawal from the Vietnam quagmire. Mao began the conversation by discussing the Soviet threat to China. Kissinger seized the opportunity to emphasize a possible Soviet attack on China and declared that the U.S. would not allow a violation of China’s security. Mao, a man with a strong sense of self-respect, felt he was being forced into passivity, and was resentful and humiliated.7

In a hastily arranged meeting with Kissinger on the evening of 13 November, Kissinger discussed Sino-U.S. military cooperation with Zhou Enlai. He suggested that the U.S. and China “sign between us an agreement on accidental nuclear war,” and “also establish a hotline.”8 Zhou didn’t make a firm commitment as he had to ask for Mao’s approval. But he was told that Mao was asleep and could not be disturbed. The next day at the time of Kissinger’s departure, Zhou told the Americans that the two sides would each appoint a representative to explore further the issue of Sino-American military cooperation. Zhou said, “We will ask Ambassador Huang Zhen (who was then director of PRC’s Liaison Office in Washington) to contact you.”9 When Zhou’s interpreter Tang Wensheng and assistant Wang Hairong reported to Mao that Zhou was too weak and incompetent in his talk with Kissinger, Mao suspected that Zhou had departed from the correct stand, and accepted U.S. nuclear protection in the event of Soviet nuclear attack.10

From 21 November to early December, in about two weeks, several sessions of enlarged Politburo meetings were held to vilify Zhou, which was unprecedented. The purpose was to disclose and criticize the so-called “Right Capitulationism” of Zhou while he presided over diplomacy toward the United States in the last several years. Zhou accepted all the extreme humiliation and acknowledged all charges against him. Only then did Mao call a temporary halt to further persecution of Zhou. But after such an organized internal political struggle and criticism of Zhou, it is hardly difficult to predict China’s perception and attitude toward the United States.

Zhou had suffered from serious bladder cancer since early 1973 and was on his deathbed. From 1974 to early 1976, Deng Xiaoping was put in charge of China’s foreign relations, especially China’s relations with the United States. However, Deng was constantly ambushed by the “Gang of Four,” who regarded him as the main obstacle to their road to

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8 Burr, *The Kissinger Transcripts*, pp. 204. However, the Chinese did not respond to Kissinger’s offer. It was not until 1998 that they would sign a hot line agreement with the United States. Kissinger hints, “Some voices in Peking may have asserted that China was ‘tilting’ too far toward the United States.” He believed that Mao’s policy was coming under great pressure; whether his proposal and Zhou’s interested response encouraged some influential Chinese to conclude that the leadership was going too far is not known. This was not the case. It was Mao himself who rejected the U.S. offer. Burr, *The Kissinger Transcripts*, p. 206.
9 Burr, *The Kissinger Transcripts*, p. 211.
the supreme power. During this period, Deng was the caretaker of China’s policy toward the United States. He couldn’t do more than that Mao’s theory stipulated.

President Gerald Ford, who succeeded Nixon was more cautious in handling U.S.-China relations. Obviously, China was unhappy with U.S.-Soviet détente. The U.S. and China made an effort to maintain its relations at a strategic level. After the fall of Saigon, “China’s strategic importance had increased. Ford believed that China was a ‘critical’ aspect of the administration’s effort to offset American setback in Asia.”11 During this period, Kissinger kept making his bi-annual trips to Beijing. For the U.S. side, the domestic political cost was too high for normalization with the PRC. Neither Kissinger nor Ford was willing to take the risk of breaking with Taiwan without a guarantee that Beijing would not conquer that island by force.12

Since Kissinger’s November 1973 trip to China, Beijing had toughened its rhetoric toward the unification of Taiwan. Mao criticized Zhou Enlai’s line that China sought to liberate Taiwan by peaceful means, saying “it can only be attacked.”13 Mao’s words about the prospective violence against Taiwan became the “mantra of the Chinese bureaucracy.” In October 1975, during Kissinger’s advance trip to China to make arrangements for President Ford’s visit to Beijing, Deng Xiaoping “delivered a blistering and contemptuous review of the Ford-Kissinger policy.”14 Deng’s tough attitude was in reality directed to shoring up and protecting his own declining status in the elite political struggle. Ford’s visit did not solve any substantial problems and did not set a timetable for normalization. It was impossible for the Ford administration to agree to a normalization agreement under the threat of violence. Immediately after Ford’s visit, to show China’s dissatisfaction with the status of Sino-American relations and alleged U.S. appeasement of the Soviet Union, the Chinese government announced the release of three crew members of a Soviet helicopter that had penetrated Chinese airspace in March 1974.16

The above analysis clearly indicates that Zhou Enlai was not in charge of China’s foreign policy making from mid-1973 until his death in early 1976. There were no “secret arrangements” between Kissinger and Zhou vis-à-vis China’s domestic politics, and U.S.-China policy during the Nixon and Ford administration had little to do with “the continued

14 Tyler, A Great Wall, pp. 187, 206-207.
15 Ford’s visit proved disappointing. The trip was cut from seven days to four, and Ford added stops in Indonesia and Philippines to give his tour greater substance. Although the Americans wanted to issue a joint statement at the end of the meeting to give the impression of headway, the Chinese refused on the grounds that no concrete progress toward normalization had been made. See Harry Harding, A Fragile Relationship: The United States and China since 1972 (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1992), p. 48.
brutality of communist rule in China.” In fact, Kissinger had an uneasy relationship with Chinese leaders because he failed to deliver the promised normalization in those years.