

# Co-revolution: Kissinger's way out of Sino-American toxic rivalry

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When Henry Kissinger met with Xi Jinping in Beijing after the presidential election in early December, Wenwei Pao, Beijing's official organ, lauded him as an "old friend of China". It went on to mention that he has written an introduction to the book *Xi Jinping: The governance of China*. He has stated that "this book has opened a door for us to clearly and thoroughly understand a leader, a country, and a thousand-year-old civilization". After the phone call between Donald Trump and Tsai Ing-Wen, a Japanese article named *China heeds Kissinger's advice on Taiwan call* points out that Xi's calm and cautious response is a result of his advice.

## Rise of China and its hawks

In Mao's time, the ideology of uniting the communist bloc and resisting the capitalist bloc had hindered the development of Sino-American relations, yet ironically, it was the Sino-Soviet Split that gave an opportunity for the normalization of Sino-American relations. In the 1980s and 1990s, the pragmatism in China's internal and foreign policies had brought China out from the destructions of the Cultural Revolution and made China focus on economic development, which provided common interests between the United States and China.

Although there were conflicts between China and America from time to time (the Tiananmen Square incident and the bombardment of Chinese Embassy in Yugoslavia, etc), the two sides have continued to communicate and develop deeper ties and interdependence. Naturally, this deviates quite a lot from the 'American imperialism' narrative prevalent among jingoist in China.

On top of summing up the history of Sino-American relations, he has predicted the trajectory of future Sino-American relations in the last chapter of his book: On one hand, the rapid economic growth of China since the 1990s has made him believe in the potential of China in reviving its glorious past. On the other hand, China's growing global influence, makes her confident enough to put its expansionist foreign policy into action.

Chinese leaders such as Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao understands the magnitude and complexity of challenges modern China has to face. Under their reign, the diplomatic strategy of China leaned towards an active yet non-aggressive line and sought mutual gains instead of the zero-sum outcome. Kissinger's interpretation is that China's 'peaceful uprising' under Hu and Wen was a deliberate message from Beijing to Washington, with the explicit goal of assuaging America's anxiety against China's explosive growth. This more or less implies that China's 'uprising' is found on the basis of good relationships between the two giants.

However, Kissinger believes that the nationalistic sentiment of the Chinese people, which mushroomed under the shadow of China's growth, has concerned the United States. Since the global financial crisis in 2008, the battered west was contrasted against a confident and ambitious China.

Addressing the growing sense of nationalism among Chinese leaders and people, Kissinger wrote about the work of Liu Mingfu, known to the media as the most celebrated hawkish scholar among the PLA.

In 2015, the New York Times published an [article](#) on Liu's book, *The Chinese Dream*. Starting with a quote from the book "China's goal in the 21st century is to become the greatest nation in the world", it concluded that "the book has analyzed America's global hegemony and suggested that China must overthrow it to secure peace, not only for its immediate region but for the world".

Naturally, Kissinger recognized the danger of a rising China going down the path of extremist nationalism, yet what concerned him more, was a growing hostility against China within the US government.

He argued, at length and in strong terms, against the Crowe School in multiple occasions. According to them, the current Sino-American rivalry is a structural and non-avertable one between the 'status quo power' and a 'rising power', whereas the former strives to maintain the international status quo and the latter strives to obtain more power in shaping the world order.

Kissinger warned that such zero-sum mentality would eventually lead to a "self-fulfilling prophecy", tearing the Sino-American relations apart; in fact, he argued that the Sino American should only be rivals in the economy, not in the military nor strategically.

The problem is as such, during the cold war, China and the States were on good terms largely due to a common enemy called the Soviet Union. Now, without a common front, how would the two nations adjust their strategic relationship?

### **Co-evolution: beyond binary opposition**

To this end, Kissinger suggested the strategic framework of 'co-evolution', in order to alleviate their conflicts of interests on issues such as nuclear proliferation, carbon budget, and climate change. Both China and America should mind their own business while opening new fronts of cooperation and avoiding confrontation. While the white house should refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of China, Beijing should continue to integrate with the international community.

He even proposed the founding of a "Pacific Commonwealth", a platform for both China and the United States to form a cooperative relationship in three major aspects: "Daily Diplomacy", "Crisis Management" and "Regional/Global governance". On the recent disputes in the South China Sea, his two cents was that the duo should pick up Deng Xiaoping's diplomatic legacies: Instead of showing hands with haste, they should plan for the long-term with prudence.

A question surface in the present context: how much influence do doves like Kissinger have in the Trump administration? After the then president-elect had a phone conversation with Taiwanese president Tsai Ing-Wen, Stephen Moore, Trump's Advisor of Economic Policies, stated that "That (Taiwan) is a country that we have backed because they believe in freedom. We oughta back our ally, and if China doesn't like it, screw 'em."

A few days after the election, a Washington Post article "[\*China wanted President Trump. It should be careful what it wished for\*](#)" has stated quite clearly that Trump's rise to power may not necessarily be beneficial to China, as, the State's foreign policy in Asia may is very likely to take a much more aggressive turn, not to mention Trump's cabinet is already full of hawks against China:

*"Other signs point to a more assertive U.S. policy in Asia. This week, two of Trump's campaign advisers — an economics professor named Peter Navarro, known for his strong criticism of China, and Alexander Gray, who served as an adviser to Forbes — published an essay in Foreign Policy magazine arguing that the Obama administration had not been tough enough on China and that a Trump presidency would pursue a policy of "peace through strength" in Asia. Navarro and Gray described the Obama administration's "pivot" as "talking loudly but carrying a small stick" and vowed a more forceful response to China's manoeuvres in the East and South China seas. Another Trump adviser is Michael Pillsbury, a former Defense Department official, who recently authored a book, "The Hundred-Year Marathon," in which he accuses generations of U.S. leaders of being bamboozled by Beijing and outlines what he claims to be a Chinese plot to dominate the world."*

Perhaps under the light of a new page in Sino-American relationship, Kissinger's vision helps us to see a bigger picture beyond dualistic opposition and to review the worldviews and political influence of the American doves. Looking back to their contribution to the rise of China, it helps us to rethink the past, present and future of the 'Chinese Model'.

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