

Mao Might Consider Modern China to Be Too Materialistic

Пише: Henry Kissinger
петак, 08 јул 2011 11:36

(Spiegel, 6.7.2011)



For decades, former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, 88, has been a keen observer of China. He spoke with SPIEGEL about his encounters with Mao Tse-tung, the future of the Chinese Communist Party and the growing rivalry between Beijing and Washington.

SPIEGEL: Mr. Secretary, you have just celebrated your 88th birthday, meaning you are almost as old as one of the most influential political parties in world history -- the Communist Party of China (CPC), which [turned 90 last week](#) . Is it still accurate to call the CPC communist? Is China, the subject of your recent book, still communist?

Kissinger: It is not a communist country in the way it was historically defined -- with state management of the economy, state determination of the distribution of income, total monopoly of every aspect of intellectual life. The reforms of Jiang Zemin in the early 2000s sought to broaden the base of the Communist Party by the doctrine of The Three Represents. But [China](#) remains a communist country in the sense that the Communist Party retains a monopoly of political power.

SPIEGEL: Do you remember when you first perceived the CPC as an historical movement, perhaps even as an historical threat?

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Kissinger: In the 1960s, I would have considered China with its [CPC](#) an ideologically more dynamic country than the Soviet Union. But the Soviet Union was strategically more threatening.

SPIEGEL: And yet you and President Richard Nixon did not shy away from resuming diplomatic relations with China's communist leadership, starting in 1973.

Kissinger: Great Britain and France had established diplomatic relations years earlier. Our talks with Beijing served a clear strategic purpose: We thought that a China and Soviet Union that balanced each other were in the Western strategic interest. Also, we thought it was very important to demonstrate to the American public, at that time divided by the Vietnam War, a new notion of international peace.

SPIEGEL: When you met with the Chinese back then, did you realize the enormous human toll these leaders had inflicted on their own people -- the Cultural Revolution, the Great Leap Forward? Did that not bother you?

Kissinger: These events were a catastrophe.



SPIEGEL: And well-documented at the time of your talks in [China](#) . The Great Leap Forward

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alone cost up to 45 million lives, according to the estimates of historians.

Kissinger: The suffering and starvation were known, but not in their full dimension. In any case, we dealt with China as a state; we did not endorse its moral direction. All of our European allies and Japan applauded this course.

SPIEGEL: Is it a choice you chose because your foreign policy considerations trumped moral ones?

Kissinger: No. Because we thought the promotion of peace was also a moral virtue, and because security was also an important objective. We would have thought that the alternative conclusion would have been not to have any contact with China.

SPIEGEL: Do you believe the CPC will still be around in another 90 years?

Kissinger: The party will have to broaden its base. There are many new forces in China, and the leaders of the current party are proclaiming that changes have to be made. The essential question, of course, is if the Chinese will in time permit the existence of alternative parties.

SPIEGEL: Does the CPC have an ideological core left, or is it now just a convenient power vehicle for the Chinese elites?

Kissinger: The party will develop in the direction of the PRI party (Institutional Revolutionary Party) that ruled Mexico for about seven decades by making pragmatic adjustments. There can be a core ideological component left which, however, will not play the comprehensive role it did in the Mao period.

SPIEGEL: The opening up of relations, which you initiated, has often been hailed as a foreign policy triumph. But it could be argued that it started a process which has now made America weaker and [China stronger](#) . The current US trade deficit with China is gigantic,

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and Beijing holds almost \$900 billion in US bonds.

Kissinger: You can say that only if you did not live then as a conscious participant in the debate. When the relationship was started, the idea that China would become an economic competitor of the United States seemed unimaginable. But what was the alternative? If a country of one billion people organizes itself, it is bound to turn into a huge competitor. The fiscal imbalance is not caused by the opening but by unwise American policies.

SPIEGEL: US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton once expressed her frustration with China by saying: "How do you deal toughly with your banker?"

Kissinger: When you owe enough money to the banker, it becomes a mutual suicide arrangement. If the Chinese try to use their position as a banker, they can do it only at the risk of losing the exports that made them a principal banker in the first place.

SPIEGEL: So you would be less worried about US debt to China than [Clinton](#) ?

Kissinger: It is difficult to judge degrees of worry. I don't believe that the banking relationship as such is unmanageable. It is, however, not feasible for the United States to run huge deficits indefinitely without endangering its general creditworthiness independent of what the Chinese do with debt they have.

SPIEGEL: Clinton was also critical of China's reaction to the Arab Spring. She said the Chinese are "scared" of it and trying to turn back history. How concerned is Beijing about the recent developments in the Middle East?

Kissinger: It is tactically and psychologically not wise to tell a country that has 4,000 years of uninterrupted history that we understand its history better than they do. But no doubt, the potential application of the principles of the Arab Spring to China is a matter of concern to the Chinese leadership.

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SPIEGEL: What would happen if social protests were to erupt in China and there was a repeat of the Tiananmen Square massacre? How would the world react?

Kissinger: The American formal position has been that we oppose violence by governments against their people. That principle should not be abandoned. The implications of that in individual cases, though, have to be seen through the context of overall foreign policy.

SPIEGEL: That leaves a lot of wiggle room.

Kissinger: For those [human rights issues](#) that we consider of fundamental importance, we have to stand up, but then we also have to understand that a foreign policy price is to be paid for that attitude.

SPIEGEL: You seem to prefer dealing with [human rights](#) issues behind closed doors, rather than in public.

Kissinger: I have always said that with respect to China, engagement is preferable.

SPIEGEL: But when China is angry with another country or, for example, with the Nobel Prize Committee for giving an award to Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo, they say so, loud and clear. That is a double standard -- why shouldn't the West criticize Beijing in public?

Kissinger: I do not criticize people who take a public stand on human rights issues. I express my respect for them. But some people are more influential without a public confrontation.

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