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On China

Henry Kissinger On China



READ BY NICHOLAS HORMANN
Unabridged



Synopsis

The eminent historian and strategist reflects on how China's past illuminates its 21st-century trajectory, drawing on 40 years of intimate acquaintance with the country and its leaders. In *On China*, Henry Kissinger turns for the first time at book length to the country he has known intimately for decades and whose modern relations with the West he helped shape. Drawing on historical records as well as on his conversations with Chinese leaders over the past 40 years, Kissinger examines how China has approached diplomacy, strategy, and negotiation throughout its history and reflects on the consequences for the 21st-century world. As Kissinger underscores, the unique conditions under which China developed continue to shape its policies and attitudes toward the outside world. For centuries, China rarely encountered other societies of comparable size and sophistication. China was the "Middle Kingdom", treating the peoples on its periphery as vassal states. At the same time, Chinese statesmen - facing threats of invasion from without and the contests of competing factions within - developed a canon of strategic thought that prized the virtues of subtlety, patience, and indirection over feats of martial prowess. *On China* examines key episodes in Chinese foreign policy, from the earliest days through the 20th century, with a particular emphasis on the modern era. Kissinger illuminates the inner workings of Chinese diplomacy during such events as the initial encounters between China and modern European powers, the formation and breakdown of the Sino-Soviet alliance, the Korean War, the opening of relations with the United States, the Tiananmen Square crackdown, and China's accession to the World Trade Organization. With a final chapter on China's 21st-century world role, *On China* provides a sweeping historical perspective on Chinese foreign policy from one of the premier statesmen of the 20th century.

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Customer Reviews

The book is of immense value to anyone with even a passing interest in US, China relations. While some may criticize HAK for his treatment of Mao and other significant dignitaries, i.e. he does not go into detail regarding personalities and character traits, he does provide adequate information concerning their thoughts and statements related to his, HAK's, experience with them. Typical of Kissinger writings related to historical events, he frames all actors in such a way as to explain their behavior, rather than to microscopically examine their motives or personalities....with the practical effect, the reader is allowed to concentrate on events, instead of becoming embroiled in particulars related to individuals.....All people have particulars, about which, volumes of speculative writings could be generated; HAK penetrates and emphasizes the traits understandable to virtually every person. I believe the great lesson presented by this volume is that deep understanding of previous events, not the random occurrence various personalities, is the touchstone of successful international relations. HAK is a master of not losing perspective on the forest by becoming too concerned with the individual trees.

I'm giving this book 5 stars because of its uniqueness and the value of its personal interpretation of events, the many direct quotes and examples given, and the the author's obvious importance in the last 40 years of world history. That is not to say this is a perfect book. It's peculiar to itself and worth the read. As someone who has studied and lived in China, though after the periods referred to in the book for the most part, I find many of his explanations and analysis to be worthy of serious consideration and based on historical fact with consideration of the ancient and modern Chinese consciousness. Do I agree with everything? No. This book would have been too tame and timid if every statement expressed in its pages were wholly supported by all readers. I anticipate, from a quick scan of other reviews, that some will find the author rather laudatory towards several of the Chinese leaders mentioned. He does show respect, something the American republic is often hesitant to do towards any foreign leader or even our own; however, you will find he writes with similar respect towards American leaders of similar time periods and it is impossible to write clear facts in some cases, without it being assumed that credit is being given. The author has a very well realized concept of the stumbling blocks, cultural tripping points and shear weight of history that face any combination of leaders from China and the U.S. as they try

to step forward into the future. In many cases, it seems that he is refraining from judgement or attempting to put forth facts that the general public with its media pipeline of information, may not have considered. One must read this book for its value as a statement of viewpoint and personally experienced event, understood from one man's perspective. It is useful, in and of itself; all accounts of history have a perspective unique to the telling and the study of what it perceived or advertised is nearly as important as the event themselves. Consider Ramesses II and his carving commemorating the defeat of the Hittites at Kadesh.

This is the best book I have read on foreign affairs, Chinese foreign affairs, and Chinese history. Mr. Kissinger's coverage of Chinese history is masterful and worth the price of the book all by itself. I have written a book summarizing history (The Super Summary of World History) and my summary of Chinese history is sophomore compared to the condensation in On China. Summarizing anything is difficult and summarizing something as complex as Chinese history is nearly impossible, but the author pulls it off as if it were no big deal. It is a very big deal and Mr. Kissinger proves he is the master of many things in this book, and foreign affairs is only the start. The author's rendition of how President Nixon opened up China, and the progress of the relationship since that time, is an absolute necessity to read for anyone interested in politics, history, foreign affairs, China, or the world. How the Americans and the Chinese went from an antagonistic relationship to one of friendship, at least at the national interest level, is fascinating. Mr. Kissinger's comments on Mao and his numerous meetings with him is equally interesting. On China never lags. Not once did I lose interest in the book or any section of the book. Mr. Kissinger's writing style is very smooth. Not at all pedantic or overbearing. The genius of On China is that it handles so much so easily. After explaining thousands of years of Chinese history the book proceeds to the modern era, the opening of China by Nixon, then the transition from Mao and the cultural revolution to China's modern day leadership. All this is bundled into one very interesting story. Mr. Kissinger's insights on the future relationship of China and the US is also critical reading. Anyone wanting to look into the future of the world should read this book. By the way, the book is very up to date as Mr. Kissinger carries the story right up to the present day. I loved the book and highly recommend it. AD2

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