

A Secret Trip to China:
Discrepancies in Henry Kissinger's Recollections of the Rapprochement

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Abstract

Enabled by the online devices of the modern age, the Internet, and social media platforms, the spread of misinformation and lies about historical and political events becomes inevitable, prompting scholars to turn away from contemporary sources and investigate ones that ought to be credible, written by the very witnesses of these affairs. However, these documents do not enjoy immunity to inconsistency either, as illustrated by the analysis of Henry Kissinger's development of a narrative regarding the United States' 1971 rapprochement with China. This study examines the evolution of Kissinger's recollection of this momentous diplomatic mission, which transformed Cold War foreign policy and laid the foundation for future cooperation between the countries. Comparing a variety of Kissinger's work, including personal reports to President Nixon, a memoir, and additional publications spanning over four decades, reveals discrepancies that allow for identifying potential motives for distorting history. The evolution of writing history in Kissinger's case manifests itself in alteration in self-portrayal and shifts in the omission and inclusion of historical details. This research demonstrates the dynamic nature of storytelling for a political figure who recollects his experiences in the form of historical accounts, depending on his aim and the socio-political context of the given period, providing insight through the examination of a foreign policy event that carries substantial contemporary relevance in the foreign policy of the United States.

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1. Introduction

In the age of the Internet and social media, society had to get accustomed to misinformation, fake news, and lies that spread like wildfire across these platforms. Unfortunately, this phenomenon reached every aspect of life and the world of academia, from healthcare, through finance and education to the fields central to this paper's discussion, history, and politics. With contemporary politics and sources becoming increasingly more unreliable, especially when it comes to the examination of historical events and the past, one might feel compelled to turn toward documents written before the online era, by the very witnesses of historical occurrences. Nevertheless, the reliability of such documents can also be questioned if examined closer, such is the case when it comes to the historical analysis of the United States' opening to China, a major event initiated in 1971 by a secret diplomatic mission of the National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, which led to a domino effect of events resulting in a change of Cold War foreign policy as a whole. This study seeks to examine Henry Kissinger's discrepant recollections of the rapprochement and details potential motives for distorting history by examining the evolution of his narrative and self-portrayal. The paper will conduct a comparative analysis of various documents, from personal reports to memoirs and books concerned with foreign policy and Sino-American relations, illustrating their individual differences and the change of narrative over four decades. By evaluating the particular motives for adjusting history in retrospect, and applying these findings to the framework of inconsistencies in Henry Kissinger's retellings, a complete picture of primary convictions and insecurities can be established. The amplification of one's historical role, the glorification or minimization of another, or the change in specific details when sharing recollections of a particular event or negotiation all emerge as areas of examination this study will encounter. These aspects of influence on the writing of history, as detailed in Lynn Hunt's *History: Why it Matters*, a book aiming to understand our past through our present justifications, are propelled by a diverse array of motives.¹ Foremost, the enhancement of one's historical significance can be recognized as a tool often implemented by leaders or

1. Lynn Hunt, *History: Why it Matters* (Polity, 2018), <https://www.perlego.com/book/1536497/history-why-it-matters-pdf>.

institutions to assert control, legitimacy, gain recognition, or amplify their reputation, proving how "[d]espite its occasional reliance on scientific techniques, history is not a science. It is a literary art that uses scientific techniques where relevant but whose fundamental aim is to tell a true story."² Moreover, changing specific details of events, and choosing what information to include or leave out can greatly alter the narrative of a historical incident, often motivated by a wish to fit into contemporary ideologies, manifesting itself in historians telling different stories based on which facts they choose to emphasize.³ As much as writers of history implement the factuality of documentation, analyzing, comparing, and selecting sources and data, their narratives can evolve and develop over time, such is the case when considering the historical storytelling of Henry Kissinger, the principal subject of this discussion.

2. Research Methodology

With respect to recollections of the past, one's memories can certainly be flawed, however, it is not an issue to disregard when an influential political figure presents continuous discrepancies and changes the perspective on one of the important pieces of foreign policy, such as the rapprochement with China for the United States. National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger emerges as an example of this matter, not to be dismissed, as his memory and recollections appear to change during his career, even spanning through decades to come thereafter. This paper analyzes this change to reveal inconsistencies and aims to identify possible patterns and motives that could have led to the distortion of this affair which proved to be one of the most significant milestones of American foreign policy with China. The basis of this comparison is the memorandum written by Henry Kissinger himself on July 14, 1971, addressed to the President, Richard Nixon, under the subject *My Talks with Chou En-lai*.⁴ This document details the two-day visit of July 9th and 10th from a profoundly short retrospect, notwithstanding it's a direct report to the President, it can therefore be presumed to be the most original and fresh presentation of the diplomatic mission. In contrast, the methodology of this paper is to analyze three different books written by Kissinger in juxtaposition to the original memorandum from varied periods of time; this provides ground to examine not only recollections of the rapprochement from different positions but equally helps to investigate these inconsistencies with the passing of time. The exploration of the

2. Hunt, *History: Why it Matters*, 24.

3. Hunt, *History: Why it Matters*, 24.

4. Henry Kissinger, *My Talks with Chou En-Lai*, U.S. Department of State, 2005, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/documents/organization/72581.pdf>

books, *White House Years* (1979), *Diplomacy* (1994), and *On China* (2011) will utilize a three-stage framework, first analyzing Kissinger's general role and position, including the National Security Advisor's stance concerning President Richard Nixon, then detailing the explicit discrepancies between the memorandum and the texts, whilst proposing potential motives behind the distortion of the past. To support the methodology of research, a variety of primary documents and historical sources will be referenced, as well as contemporary studies of Henry Kissinger's character with a particular focus on historian Niall Ferguson's work titled *The Meaning of Kissinger: A Realist Reconsidered*.⁵ This article investigates not only Kissinger's political philosophy, role, and significance, but reinterprets the traditional understanding of his activity, which can be applied to this examination in order to broaden the comprehension of the topic. The scope of the study includes these documents and comparisons within the limitations of the paper, however, this research can be further extended to investigate a wider range of literature written and verbalized by Henry Kissinger to get an even more complete understanding of this inconsistent memory regarding the rapprochement.

3. Historical Context and Relevance

In order to recognize the significance of the topic, it is indispensable to evaluate its elements, such as understanding the geopolitical setting and historical context which ultimately led to the secret diplomatic trip to Beijing and facilitated progress in the bilateral relationship of the United States (U.S.) and China. In 1949, the People's Republic of China (PRC) was established by Communist Party leader Mao Zedong, forcing the Nationalist government of Chiang Kai-shek to evade to Taiwan. The US remained in support of the exiled Republic of China government in Taipei, resulting in decades of limited relations with the mainland territory.⁶ The outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 led to a deepening divide between the two countries as the PRC supported the effort of communist North Korea, whilst the U.S. assisted the South. Several other conflicts contributed to a pattern of continuous discord between the two countries, such as the First Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1954 or the Tibetan Uprising which came to a climactic point in 1959, when the U.S. joined the United Nations in its fight against Beijing's human rights abuse in the region, while arming the

5. Niall Ferguson, "The Meaning of Kissinger: A Realist Reconsidered", *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 5 (2015): 134–43. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24483745>.

6. "Timeline: U.S.-China Relations," Council on Foreign Relations, accessed December 10, 2024, www.cfr.org/timeline/us-china-relations.

Tibetan resistance via the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) from the late 1950s."⁷ Furthermore, the Sino-Soviet split caused mainly by ideological differences resulted in a deterioration in the relationship between the USSR and the PCR, eventually leading to "Moscow replacing Washington as China's biggest threat, contributing to the potential of rapprochement by the US towards Beijing."⁸ The first public sign indicating the end of decades of disagreement and conflict occurred in 1971 under the name of Ping-Pong diplomacy, as American players were invited to China to play, arriving alongside journalists reporting on the occasion. These events illustrate the changing relationship between the United States and the People's Republic of China from its establishment in 1949 until 1971, which marks the year of the secret diplomatic trip conducted by Henry Kissinger that became a central building block of future diplomacy.

Furthermore, before directly analyzing the secret diplomatic mission, it is essential to outline the position, role, and political ideology of Henry Kissinger, providing ground for analyzing his recollections of the event. Henry Kissinger, a late professor of Harvard University specializing in international relations and security studies became part of Richard Nixon's administration as National Security Advisor in 1969 and continued to serve as Secretary of State between 1973 and 1977, reaching into the Ford administration. Kissinger was the United States' 56th Secretary of State, a scholar, and a Nobel Peace Prize Laureate who contributed to the establishment of a new world order after World War II and navigated a complicated period of foreign policy obstacles.⁹ His political philosophy and strategy became a unique notion in the American government, as it challenged more traditional approaches and ignored the loud anti-China voices opposing rapprochement based on the fear of the Red Scare and the spread of communism, therefore became a force behind change in Cold War foreign policy. The perspective of realpolitik represented by Henry Kissinger is detailed in Niall Ferguson's *The Meaning of Kissinger: A Realist Reconsidered* both in its traditional and reinterpreted sense, which is conventionally associated with "realism, a philosophy characterized by the cool assessment of foreign policy in the stark light of national self-interest", often criticized for the sole interest in order and power, abandoning moral and ideological considerations.¹⁰ However, historians such as Ferguson who aimed at re-

7. "Timeline: U.S.-China Relations."

8. "Timeline: U.S.-China Relations."

9. "Henry A. Kissinger," Henry A. Kissinger, accessed January 5, 2025, <https://www.henryakissinger.com/>.

10. Ferguson, "The Meaning of Kissinger: A Realist Reconsidered", 134.

conceptualizing Kissinger's political identity claim that his ideology introduces additional complexity to realpolitik when it comes to foreign policy. These key insights include proposals such as "history is the key to understanding rivalries and allies; one must confront the problem of conjecture, with its asymmetric payoffs; many foreign policy decisions are choices between evils; and leaders should be wary of the perils of a morally vacuous realism."¹¹ These components describe the nature of Henry Kissinger's attitude toward foreign policy during the Cold War and elucidate the diplomatic strategy implemented in the case of the U.S.-China rapprochement. Despite being criticized for his approach, his influence in shaping Cold War foreign policy and the secret trip to China highlight the importance of his role and propose the necessity of his framework. His perspective introduced the People's Republic of China as a potential partner to counterbalance the influence of the Soviet Union, fundamentally changing the global scene of the conflict and ultimately preventing the Soviet expansion and communism wished to be achieved by even his critics in government.¹²

Pertaining to the central event of this paper, the secret diplomatic trip to China in 1971, Henry Kissinger's contribution illustrated by reliance on his connections to establish potential channels of communication and facilitate a relationship with Beijing was an indispensable element necessary for the success of the mission. As early as February 1969, Kissinger provided Richard Nixon with a report concerning "interesting comments" he received from China through a Polish source, signaling his attempts to open towards China through backchannels with the complete support and encouragement of the President.¹³ The National Security Advisor's efforts persisted and reached another vocal point in August when Kissinger managed to pass word along through Pakistani President Yahya Khan regarding the U.S.'s openness to facilitate rapprochement with the Chinese.¹⁴ This strategy resulted in significant achievement and eventually triggered positive feedback from the PCR in the beginning of 1970, hence "Yahya told Kissinger that the Chinese were encouraged by U.S. initiatives, but they did not want discussions to signal Chinese weakness or fear."¹⁵ This

11. Ferguson, "The Meaning of Kissinger: A Realist Reconsidered", 137.

12. Ferguson, "The Meaning of Kissinger: A Realist Reconsidered", 143.

13. "Getting to Beijing: Henry Kissinger's Secret 1971 Trip" USC US-China Institute, accessed December 20, 2024, <https://china.usc.edu/getting-beijing-henry-kissingers-secret-1971-trip>.

14. "Getting to Beijing: Henry Kissinger's Secret 1971 Trip."

15. U.S. Department of State, *Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon*, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XVII: China, 1973-1976, Document 70, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v17/d70>.

exchange signaled that both countries placed a heavy emphasis on secrecy, as in the case of the American government the fear of communism prevented a public operation and prompted Nixon and Kissinger to avoid any unnecessary involvement from members of the White House. In the spring of 1970 and early 1971, Henry Kissinger sought out three new lines of communication. First, he met Romanian President Nicolae Ceausescu and indicated the United States' aim to communicate with Chinese officials, which he also expressed to Corneliu Bogdan Romanian ambassador a few months later.¹⁶ Finally, he conveyed this message through French official Jean Sainteny, too. All these instances illustrate Henry Kissinger's involvement in opening communication channels towards China, which came to fruition accordingly on April 21, 1971, as Premier Zhou Enlai sent a message through Pakistani President Yahya pertaining to the acceptance of a meeting between the two governments.¹⁷

Between July 9 and 10, a two-day meeting was held between Henry Kissinger and Premier Zhou Enlai which ended decades of limited relationship, even situations of complete disagreement and conflict, and transformed the global Cold War scene through the efforts of the National Security Advisor. Ultimately, the change in foreign policy between the United States and China was a major sphere exemplifying Henry Kissinger's impact and influence. As the path of communication was opened, the chance of common diplomacy followed, along the strategy represented and proposed by Kissinger. This philosophy, described by Evelyn Goh, Shedden Professor of Strategic Policy Studies "was realist and based on the assessment of national interest; it was not aimed at fostering conflict among the major powers and would thus be even-handed; but it was antihegemonic and so would favor a strong PRC which could help to act as counterweight against the Soviet Union."¹⁸ Consequently, signs of normalization and cooperation manifested themselves in the years to follow, such as setting up liaison offices in both the People's Republic of China and the United States, "closely

16. Henry Kissinger, *Kissinger Reports to Nixon Following Discussion with Ceausescu*, memorandum, October 27, 1970, <https://china.usc.edu/sites/default/files/article/attachments/19701027-kissinger-reports-to-nixon-ceausescu.pdf>.

17. "Getting to Beijing: Henry Kissinger's Secret 1971 Trip."

18. Evelyn Goh, "Nixon, Kissinger, and the 'Soviet Card' in the U.S. Opening to China, 1971–1974," *Diplomatic History* 29, no. 3 (2005): 478., <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24915131>.

equivalent to Embassies in everything but name."¹⁹ The meeting paved the way for President Nixon's visit to China in 1972 and became the basis of several future commitments and strategic relationships between the two countries. Such is the case of the 1973 summit declaration offered by Kissinger which showcased the continuity in friendly relationships, even in the face of the Soviet Union, according to which neither parties would "engage in negotiations against the other or join in any agreement without consultation with each other."²⁰ In essence, the secret trip to China laid the foundation for future cooperation and partnership between the two parties; this affiliation is one of the clear indicators of Henry Kissinger's impact on Cold War politics.

One must also acknowledge the contemporary consequences and significance of the rapprochement and the argument of the research, as it had an overarching effect on U.S.-China relationship, hence they continue to change and evolve to this day. In the 1970s, China did not have a direct partnership with the United States (U.S.), it was rather used to force the USSR to the meeting tables as part of the triangle diplomacy based on the bipolar confrontation of the U.S. and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. In this period, anti-Chinese voices were particularly loud in the American government due to issues like the Red Scare and the fear of communism, thus President Nixon advocated for utmost secrecy in the case of this diplomacy. However, as American political scientist Chalmers Johnson remarked, blowback "is in the DNA of American grand strategy", accordingly, "while the U.S. was 'busy feasting at the Chinese table', U.S. grand strategists overlooked the risk of China's rise", which is exactly what came to follow.²¹ With regard to the past two decades, this shift became evident with President Barack Obama having introduced his pivot to Asia policy, working on establishing relationships with countries in close proximity to the People's Republic of China, in both economic and political senses to counter the rise of a potential rival superpower.²² This strategy transcended into the Trump and Biden administrations and resembles a form of

19. Goh, "Nixon, Kissinger, and the 'Soviet Card' in the U.S. Opening to China, 1971–1974," 485.

20. Goh, "Nixon, Kissinger, and the 'Soviet Card' in the U.S. Opening to China, 1971–1974," 485

21. Zeno Leoni and Geraint Hughes, "The 50th Anniversary of Kissinger's Secret Trip to China: From The..." Feature from *King's College London*, July 8, 2021. <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/the-50th-anniversary-of-kissingers-secret-trip-to-china-from-the-cold-war-to-a-new-cold-war>.

22. Leoni and Hughes, "The 50th Anniversary of Kissinger's Secret Trip to China: From The..."

Chinese containment among maritime nations.²³ Contemporarily, the rapid modernization and militarization of China begs for the question of whether it will become a real contender in the race for global superpower pushing the United States aside. Would this be an undesired impact of the U.S.-Chinese rapprochement? Different perspectives surround this issue with clear relevance in the United States' present and future, such as Michael Lind American academic and writer, who views China's rise cautiously and advocates for its management over alliances and strategic diplomacy.²⁴ Others partake in a more optimistic perspective, for instance, Joseph S. Nye American political scientist who whilst acknowledging China's development and power believes the U.S. will remain the dominant global force.²⁵

4. *White House Years* (1979)

As the first component of the study, the book *White House Years* (1979) is one of the first major publications by Henry Kissinger after having resigned from the position of Secretary of State in 1977, presented in a memoir encompassing his account of American foreign policy from his initial work as National Security Advisor from 1969 until the end of negotiations in Vietnam in 1973.²⁶ The depiction of this period coincides precisely with the interval of the secret trip to China, including its planning, execution, and immediate consequences, hence providing ample material to be compared to the original memorandum. As stated by Kissinger, the reiteration of the book "is put forward here as honestly as possible, with the intention to reconcile, not to score retrospective debating points" in case of issues such as the controversy surrounding the American treatment of foreign policy during the Vietnam War.²⁷ Moreover, Kissinger claims: "[i]n writing this account I have tried to keep reliance on memory to a minimum; I have been able to refer to much documentary evidence, and for part of this period, a diary I kept."²⁸ Based on this statement, it could be proposed that the memoir illustrates the secret trip in a factual, objective, and complete manner, as much as the initial report to President Nixon would, nonetheless, the foreword addresses this issue in more detail. Kissinger admits that writing history may have become nearly impossible, as the

23. Leoni and Hughes, "The 50th Anniversary of Kissinger's Secret Trip to China: From The..."

24. Michael Lind, *The American Way of Strategy* (Oxford University Press, 2023)

25. Joseph S. Nye, *Is the American Century Over?* (Polity, 2015)

26. Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Little, Brown and Company, 1979)

27. Kissinger, *White House Years*, xxi.

28. Kissinger, *White House Years*, xxii.

written record of even a few years long periods could initial millions of historical documents and data to include, which could be subconsciously manipulated in terms of selective presentation, undisclosed details, accounts of conversations with the premise of self-justification and self-protection:

The participant in great events is of course not immune to these tendencies when he writes his account. Obviously, his perspective will be affected by his own involvement; the impulse to explain merges with the impulse to defend. But the participant has at least one vital contribution to the writing of history: He will *know* which of the myriad of possible considerations in fact influenced his decisions in which he was involved; he will be aware of which documents reflect the reality as he perceived it; he will be able to recall what views were taken seriously, which were rejected, and the reasoning behind the choices made.²⁹

This assertion appears in a form resembling a confession, that of the contents of the book have been influenced by Henry Kissinger as an object to write down history swayed by several factors, ultimately leading to possible changes in the story presented in the 1971 memorandum, which is to be investigated.

First, when taking the self-examination of Henry Kissinger regarding his role and position during the secret diplomatic mission into account, it can be deduced that he emphasizes the importance of the event as much as the significance of his own involvement as the sole executor of Nixon's vision. He portrays himself as the primary negotiator and strategist, the right-hand man of the President in the course of Cold War foreign policy strategy. Kissinger summarizes the importance of the mission accordingly, "after having had no communication with Chinese leaders for twenty years, we had conducted one of the most comprehensive reviews of international relations in my diplomatic experience", and "[w]e have brought new flexibility to our foreign policy".³⁰ When it comes to his own portrayal, several of his claims underline why he proved to be the perfect candidate for the mission, for instance, his having the greatest familiarity and understanding of policy, as well as the ability to arrange future meetings that ensure the comfort of President Nixon.³¹ Furthermore, he lists his subjection to the President as a reason as to why he was chosen, namely having no power to publicize and claim the achievements potentially fulfilled through the mission, proposing a guarantee that his "success would be a Presidential success."³² This suggests his view that

29. Kissinger, *White House Years*, xxii.

30. Kissinger, *White House Years*, 787.

31. Kissinger, *White House Years*, 717.

32. Kissinger, *White House Years*, 717.

Nixon wished to be, in the eyes of the public at least, the main character celebrated in the story of the U.S.-China rapprochement. He emphasizes this proposal by detailing how Nixon "was eager to be known as the first American leader to visit Peking; he requested me periodically to change the venue of my own visit to any other place in China", moreover how he wished his name was announced instead of Kissinger's on the first official Sino-American document.³³ These acclamations suggest that the National Security Advisor saw the President as one determined to receive the acknowledgment for accomplishments in Beijing, despite his actual participation in the efforts. Kissinger presumably believed himself to be the actual force behind the negotiations, despite potentially not receiving due credit, expressing that "the character of leaders is tested by their willingness to persevere in the face of uncertainty and to build a future they can neither demonstrate nor fully discern. But every once in a while a fortunate few can participate in an event that they *know* will make a difference", clearly intending this statement as self-description.³⁴ Although Kissinger does not completely deny the President's contribution, accentuating several of his significant steps made to pave the way for the rapprochement, these remarks can be questioned in light of the general statements made to reiterate his pursuit for public recognition. From this double perspective, there is a particular phrase to investigate: "Nixon's determination that he, not the State Department should be seen — justly — as the originator of China policy."³⁵ This prompt occupies a unique position in the chapter, as the use of two em dashes to capture a single word to make it stand out in a sentence is not a stylistic choice made by Kissinger elsewhere in the chapter. The main implication in most cases is to highlight historical background information, provide explanations, or add personal comments to a topic, this instance deters from this trend. As Kissinger's opinion on Nixon seems to be ambivalent, the composition of this sentence can be understood the same way; it is either used to pay tribute to him or conversely, to sarcastically hide his disagreement with this intention.

Second, the comparison of *White House Years* (1979) and the original memorandum *My Talks with Chou En-lai* (1971) reveals contradictions in the realm of tone, presentation, and the description of the secret trip to China specifically. In the transcript, the illustration of Kissinger focuses on more practical considerations such as Taiwan and normalization in U.S.-China relations, contrary to the book's emphasis on a more reflective and ideologically

33. Kissinger, *White House Years*, 734.

34. Kissinger, *White House Years*, 716.

35. Kissinger, *White House Years*, 716.

detailed approach. In the case of Taiwan, as Kissinger writes in the transcript, Chou En-lai states that the United States must "recognize that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China, and a province of China", an assertion highly clear-cut and direct.³⁶ The requirements of the People's Republic of China are written in a listed format, suggesting them to be indispensable for any future cooperation. From this perspective, the demands including the PRC's sole legitimacy, complete U.S. military withdrawal from the Taiwan Strait, and the dismissal of the U.S.-ROC Mutual Defense Treaty seem central to the discussion. The transcript also paints Taiwan to be a major element of the very first meeting, as both Kissinger and Chou En-lai bring up the topic for discussion.³⁷ Contrary to this is the portrayal of the first conversation presented in the memoir, which claims that "Taiwan was mentioned only briefly during the first session. Yet some 9 pages, nearly 20 percent, of the 46-page record of the first Zhou-Kissinger meeting on 9 July 1971, include discussion of Taiwan, with Kissinger disavowing Taiwanese independence and committing to withdraw two-thirds of U.S. military forces from the island once the Vietnam War ended."³⁸ The memoir also details the personality and characteristics of Chou En-lai in larger detail, adding a philosophical and ideological layer to the discussion, such as stating he is "urban, infinitely patient, extraordinarily intelligent, subtle, he moved through discussions with an easy grace that penetrated through the essence of our new relationship as if there were no sensible alternative."³⁹ Conversely, the memorandum states the same information reported to Nixon back in 1971 as short as "genial, urbane, with a refreshing sense of humor".⁴⁰ In essence, in comparison to the original memorandum, the memoir gives a less focused presentation of the matter-of-fact issues surrounding Taiwan, at the same time as including various ideological embellishments absent from the report through its mood and presentation.

Pertaining to the illustration of the secret trip to China, different areas reveal discrepancies, such as the first arrival of Kissinger and Chinese protocols. In the memorandum, the plane ride to China accompanied by Chinese officials is reiterated briefly, the members of the Chinese delegation are described as individuals who wished to ascertain

36. Kissinger, *My Talks with Chou En-Lai*, 12.

37. Kissinger, *My Talks with Chou En-Lai*, 2-3.

38. William Burr, ed., *The Beijing-Washington Back-Channel and Henry Kissinger's Secret Trip to China*, February 27, 2002, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB66/#5>.

39. Kissinger, *White House Years*, 745.

40. Kissinger, *My Talks with Chou En-Lai*, 7.

that Kissinger was prepared to visit the country and that his intention was the conduct of "constructive talks between equals".⁴¹ The same event is described in the memoir with the addition of a more dramatic tone and the emphasis on the historical and cultural context regarding the parties: "The Chinese and we sat around a table in easy conversation, as if there had never been a day's interruption in contacts between our nations; there was nothing to remind one of the bitter invective that only yesterday had been routine in all our countries' public discourse about each other."⁴² Generally speaking, the content of the original report includes more factual and straight-forward information, whilst the detailed description of the memoir allows for the addition of cultural emphasis and story-telling, swaying away from the strict rewriting of history and including personal experience which in turn influenced the understanding of the event. Another component of the secret mission, the conditions of secrecy and appear in a different light in the two documents. It is clear, that the secrecy surrounding the mission, such as Nixon's desire to conduct the trip to China without the knowledge of as many members of the White House as possible, raised suspicions from Chinese counterparts, which notion was equally expressed in the documents. However, the report is short and pragmatic, stating that Chinese officials aboard the plane to the meeting were worried about Kissinger visiting in secret.⁴³ The same interaction is written in a less harsh manner in the book, namely how "they probed gently into the reason for our insistence on secrecy".⁴⁴ In essence, as in the case of arrival and protocol, *White House Years* (1979) details the questions of secrecy in a way that illustrates the Chinese delegation's approach in a less cut-out and direct way.

Third, to examine the potential motivation behind the discrepancies, Henry Kissinger's self-examination and perspective on President Nixon emerges as one of the most potent potential reasons behind the case. Based on several recounts, the National Security Advisor often portrays himself as the main power and central architect of the secret mission, describing Nixon's determination to claim the success achieved by Kissinger's contribution to himself. The details suggesting this view are of course left out of the memorandum in 1971, hence they were directly addressed to the President; at the writing of the memoir in 1979 Kissinger and Nixon were both already resigned from the government, it can be suggested that this gave way to more openly express this divide and personal attitude. Enhancing his

41. Kissinger, *My Talks with Chou En-Lai*, 2.

42. Kissinger, *White House Years*, 745.

43. Kissinger, *My Talks with Chou En-Lai*, 2.

44. Kissinger, *White House Years*, 745.

role and personal contributions could have been an attempt at redemption caused by controversies surrounding his foreign policy initiatives in Vietnam, or an attempt to gain recognition for his achievements for a broader audience. Since the book is written in a memoir format, we can assume that this personal retelling of events portrays Kissinger's own views and feelings about himself and the President he advised in the most honest and subjective manner, extending this to the understanding of the secret trip to China, as well as the years preceding and following it. In terms of the mood and presentation of the historical framework, differing from the factual listing of the People's Republic of China's demand for future cooperation with mention of the tension surrounding Taiwan, the book downplays the importance of the topic in several cases and adds an ideological layer to the conversation with the inclusion of historical and cultural context. The description of the trip's certain elements, such as the first arrival to China and the meeting protocols with the delegation is presented in a more detailed way, resembling a personal story rather than a factual retelling of a historical event, which Kissinger already addressed in the foreword of the book, further proving its accuracy. In conclusion, *White House Years* (1979) gives an infinitely more personal account of the secret trip to China, including details that suggest Kissinger's enhancement of his own role in the face of Nixon's, a less factual mood and presentation of issues such as Taiwan, as well as details of the mission surrounding Chinese protocol and attitude toward U.S. secrecy, which in turn provide a less pragmatic picture than the memorandum of 1971.

5. *Diplomacy* (1994)

The second element of comparison, *Diplomacy* (1994) provides a grand narrative of global diplomacy and how the balance of power and the arrival of a new world order shaped global politics. In this book, Kissinger dissects broader ideologies and strategies of American foreign policy such as realpolitik and idealism, "together with a wealth of detailed and original observations on the secret negotiations, great events, and the art of statesmanship that have shaped our lives in the decades before, during and since Henry Kissinger was himself at the center of things."⁴⁵ By 1994, Kissinger has not only resigned from the White House, but the immediacies of the Cold War period have also passed, allowing for an analysis of events with a focus on broader historical causes, consequences, and implications. Based on this, one can assume that the trajectory of the secret diplomatic mission and its recollections will also

45. Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (Simon & Schuster, 1994) back cover.

put a larger emphasis on political ideologies preceding and surrounding the trip, as well as the role of other major powers such as the Soviet Union in the global framework of the triangle diplomacy; this is opposed to the memorandum's limitation to the specific event and its word-of-matter report of the meetings in Beijing between the National Security Advisor and Premier Chou En-lai.

First, when it comes to the interpretation of his own role and position, Kissinger shares views that suggest heavy influence by notions of the realpolitik ideology, describing the importance of global relations and strategic foreign policy at the time of the secret mission. The rapprochement with China is viewed in the light of a broader picture, Kissinger describes the importance of the mission from this perspective, also highlighting the role of another major power, the USSR: "[i]f we could determine what we suspected—that the Soviet Union and China were more afraid of each other than they were of the United States—an unprecedented opportunity for American diplomacy would come into being."⁴⁶ When considering the question of China, the secret trip itself is not mentioned in significant length, the focus is rather on the global scene and the need to maintain the U.S.'s position as the leading power. In the geopolitical setting preceding Kissinger's meeting in Beijing and in the instance of triangle diplomacy, the influence of the Sino-Soviet split is described as a central element of the discussion, especially regarding how it contributed to the possibility of an American initiative to induce cooperation with the PCR. This notion also manifests itself when it comes to Kissinger's description of the secret mission, as frequent comparisons are made between the Chinese and Soviet officials in general.

When it comes to evaluating his own role in the face of Nixon's, Kissinger praises the President's shift in political consideration due to its divergence from previous notions and views in the White House, which happens to follow the ideology most commonly associated with Kissinger himself, a return to the world of realpolitik.⁴⁷ In the chapters associated with secret mission to China, Kissinger portrays Nixon as a revolutionary President who implemented this new approach and urged rapprochement with a country the United States had no contact with for the course of twenty years either on the level of diplomacy, or media.⁴⁸ *Diplomacy* (1994) credits President Nixon's willingness and courage to challenge conventions based on a more pragmatic ideology, placing U.S. priorities at the forefront of

46. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 722.

47. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 724.

48. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 724.

American policy, with "tangible expression of his Administration's new emphasis on basing American policy on the careful analysis of the national interest."⁴⁹ The concepts of realpolitik, national interest, and a more pragmatic approach coincide perfectly with the philosophy of Kissinger, therefore his appraisal can be understood as genuine agreement and praise, hence they align with his own perspectives. Kissinger does not recollect his own contribution from a point of subjective, personal retelling, therefore the possible enhancement or downplay of his character and activity is not apparent. To reiterate, the book, offering an overarching view on history and diplomacy, places a heavy emphasis on the presentation of the U.S.-China rapprochement in the context of a broader global picture with the inclusion of the triangle ideology. Kissinger's reflections on President Nixon highlight his role as a unique President with strategic brilliance due to the imminent inclusion of realpolitik, whilst excluding the close examination of his own contribution.

Second, when comparing the brief account of the diplomatic mission of only a few pages in *Diplomacy* (1944) and the memorandum *My Talks with Chou En-lai* (1994) there are inconsistencies, as well as commonalities to be examined. In the case of geopolitical framing of the event, the contextualization of the trip appears similarly in the memorandum and in the book on the ground of ideology and diplomatic strategy. The vision of the diplomatic mission is characterized by a general initiative to exploit division between China and the Soviet Union in both documents. In the relevant chapter of *Diplomacy* (1994) Kissinger states:

The ostentatious renunciation of collusion with either of the communist giants served as an invitation to each to improve relations with Washington and as a warning to each of the consequences of continued hostility. To the extent that both China and the Soviet Union calculated that they either needed American goodwill or feared an American move toward its adversary, both had an incentive to improve their relations with Washington.⁵⁰

Only after this claim and the re-visitation of other global questions such as the controversies of the Warsaw talks, the deadlock that followed thereafter, and the case of the Cambodian attack does Kissinger mention his trip to Beijing with details of his personal planning or preparation completely absent, providing a definitive interpretation of events.⁵¹ Similarly, the 1971 memorandum includes the practical argument of the Sino-Soviet split's significance by highlighting the importance of great power relations and Chou En-lai's apprehension over

49. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 723.

50. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 725.

51. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 726.

major alliances that could threaten the PRC, particularly between the United States and the Soviet Union.⁵² The memorandum also expresses congruent opinions over ideological differences between U.S. officials and the Chinese delegation compared to the book's content, by Kissinger's description of a "wide chasm of ideology and isolation" separating the counterparts of the secret meetings.⁵³ Although, this expression is accompanied by the mention of the prospect for normalization and cooperation despite these differences. Kissinger expresses a similar understanding of the ideological divide in *Diplomacy* (1994) due to the lack of diplomatic relations, common vocabulary, and the absence of decades of continuous contact.⁵⁴

As opposed to similarities in the portrayal of the general geopolitical setting and ideological divide, one of the most important elements of the 1971 talks, the case of Taiwan, is painted in a different light by Kissinger in the two documents. In the original report, Chou En-lai's stance is explicitly described as demanding and clear about the PCR's requirement for the United States to maintain a "One China" principle, portrayed by the listing of policies to follow in order for any future cooperation and the expressions as detailed in the comparison with *White House Years* (1979) in the previous section, for instance, the proposal that "Taiwan is an inalienable part of China, and a province of China."⁵⁵ The rigid standpoint of Chou En-lai regarding Taiwan is described clearly by Kissinger in the memorandum, but he diverges from this when it comes to the book's illustration of the Chinese officials who "considered the traditional agenda to be of secondary importance, and were above all concerned with exploring whether cooperation on the basis of congruent interests was possible", consequently quoting the remark "[t]he small issue is Taiwan; the big issue is the world."⁵⁶ This discrepancy coincides with the original purpose of the book, it depicts every mission and negotiation as not a singular important entity, but rather a part of the panorama of global diplomacy and the continuity of American foreign policy strategies. The clear-cut, heavily detailed description of the secret trip, alongside the central role of Taiwan, is pushed aside in *Diplomacy* (1994) for the sake of a more global portrayal of events, with an emphasis on triangle diplomacy, ideology, and divides with other major global forces like the Soviet Union. Despite the similarities to be examined between the memorandum and the book, the

52. Kissinger, *My Talks with Chou En-Lai*, 22.

53. Kissinger, *My Talks with Chou En-Lai*, 6.

54. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 725.

55. Kissinger, *My Talks with Chou En-Lai*, 12.

56. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 726.

main aim of the latter results in a downplaying of the significance of the secret mission itself, notwithstanding its central discussions regarding the Taiwan question.

Third, to analyze potential motives behind discrepancies, it is important to bring Kissinger's ability to frame different events with hindsight and subtly adjust tone and emphasis pertaining to certain elements of discussion forward. By giving substantial credit to President Nixon for his realpolitik approach to the Cold War situation, the strategic success of both his own ideology and the United States' foreign policy is amplified in comparison to the memorandum. In this case, Kissinger's own personal contribution is less defined, the focus is rather on the role of the country's and its leadership's ability to navigate strategies of foreign policy of a global sphere. Despite Kissinger being a known representative of the realpolitik approach, his appraisal is directed at Nixon and his political implementation of it, not as a way to receive honor for potentially advocating this view. As a result, the legitimacy and success of the ideology are emphasized, without the establishment of personal connection or ratification, therefore it seems like a genuine triumph instead of a subjective preference. The significance of the secret trip is also described differently, portrayed in the 1971 report as a more direct discussion of issues such as the People's Republic of China's sole arguments for a proposed relationship between the United States and China, whilst the book provides a briefer discussion of the meetings themselves, accentuating their role in the framework of larger initiatives.⁵⁷ It is, after all, the aim of Kissinger's *Diplomacy* (1994) to portray the overarching causes and consequences via his recollection which in turn might understate the prominence of each of its elements.

6. *On China* (2011)

The third component of the comparative analysis, *On China* (2011), as immediately as in its preface establishes Henry Kissinger's main standpoint and focus regarding the relationship between the United States and the People's Republic of China, instantly reflecting on the secret diplomatic trip: "[f]orty years ago, almost to the day, President Richard Nixon did me the honor of sending me to Beijing to reestablish contact with a country central to the history of Asia with which America had had no high-level contact for over twenty years."⁵⁸ In this work, Kissinger shares his foreign policy recollections accumulated over the course of four decades, including more than fifty visits to China, signaling credible experience and

57. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 726.

58. Henry Kissinger, *On China* (The Penguin Press, 2011)

understanding of their foreign policy respective to the United States. His perspective focuses on the description of China's historical and cultural worldview in the face of the United States' often more pragmatic approach – especially in the period the secret mission took place, simultaneously exploring the dynamics of the evolving interactions and cooperative relationship which proved to be an indispensable element for the mission of global peace in the 21st century.⁵⁹ Aside from a strictly historical examination of foreign policy, *On China* (2011), "is an effort, based in part on conversations with Chinese leaders, to explain the conceptual way the Chinese think about problems of peace and war and international order."⁶⁰ Based on this, we can draw the conclusion that the analysis of past events is based on, to the same degree, a personal re-examination of meetings between Kissinger and Chinese officials with the primary inclusion of Chou En-lai and the secret mission to China. In essence, it can be presumed that the book provides an interwoven picture of Chinese-American foreign policy, a historical approach encompassing the whole history of the People's Republic of China and a more subjective recollection of conversations with its leaders and details of the specific negotiations. This combination implies a fusion of the previous two comparisons, namely the personal tone of *White House Years* (1979) and the political orientation of *Diplomacy* (1994), which demonstrates the evolvement of Henry Kissinger's narrative and storytelling with the passing of time.

First, in the context of Kissinger's memory of his position and role during the years surrounding the secret meetings, the National Security Advisor frames himself as the chief executor of the trip which became a pivotal moment in American foreign policy. Kissinger recognizes the importance of his contribution as well as the intricate nature of the negotiations, stating that "the underlying challenge of the secret visit was to establish enough confidence to turn a first meeting into a process", a mission he successfully carried out as it laid the foundation for future cooperation and President Nixon's visit in Beijing during the following year, in 1972.⁶¹ Notwithstanding highlighting the diplomatic vision of Nixon to reshape power dynamics globally by initiating communication with China, Kissinger describes his own influence in detail, such as listing his task to maintain complete secrecy and negotiate terms in a way that ensures subsequent partnership. Moreover, Kissinger emphasizes the risks he undertook by his very presence in Beijing, as it "was a grievous blow

59. Kissinger, *On China*, preface.

60. Kissinger, *On China*, preface.

61. Kissinger, *On China*, 222.

to Hanoi, raising the implication of its isolation", referring to how the outcome of the secret meeting could lead to the deterioration of the relationship between the United States and Vietnam.⁶² This notion in conjunction with the demanding responsibility of the secret meeting on a global level of foreign policy results in an exceptionally favorable presentation of the National Security Advisor. As far as the depiction of President Nixon, the same tendency can be analyzed, hence the apparent recognition of Nixon's aspiration for the transformation of U.S.-China relationships. The sophisticated relationship between the President and Henry Kissinger is described in detail, especially on the front of mutual trust: "[t]o be sure, had we left without progress, it would have been a major embarrassment to Nixon, who had not shared my mission with any other Cabinet member."⁶³ The ideological vision of the President is portrayed to be triumphant in an even more direct way by Kissinger claiming him to be the "architect of the opening to China", with the evolvement of Cold War patterns to a new global international order despite the Soviet Union still posing a major threat of security.⁶⁴ In essence, in view of self-examination, Henry Kissinger utilizes a careful balance of crediting Richard Nixon for the recognition of foreign policy strategies that continued to shape the Sino-American relationship, at the same time as recollecting the importance of his own responsibility and activity which contributed to the success of the mission. This equilibrium, just like the one the United States wished to establish in 1971, unionizes Kissinger's personal interpretation of *White House Years* (1979) and the more foreign policy and global strategy-oriented focus of *Diplomacy* (1994).

Second, by comparing the 1971 memorandum and *On China* (2011), the general account of the geopolitical setting and the ideology and role of the realpolitik approach appear in an analogous form, however, certain details reveal inconsistencies. The Cultural Revolution, launched by Mao Zedong in 1966 aiming to preserve Chinese socialism is mentioned in both texts, only in different lengths and tones of presentation. In the memorandum, only a short section is dedicated to the topic: "[a]t the end of lunch Chou launched into a moving account of the Cultural Revolution which he continued to relate even after I noted that this was China's internal affair."⁶⁵ This assessment sets a sentiment indicating Kissinger distances himself from this discussion and does not elaborate on its implications on global foreign policy or its possible effect on future negotiations or U.S.-

62. Kissinger, *On China*, 229.

63. Kissinger, *On China*, 207.

64. Kissinger, *On China*, 324-325.

65. Kissinger, *My Talks with Chou En-Lai*, 4.

China cooperation. The Cultural Revolution is only mentioned one more time explicitly in the document, being presented as "tales" by Chou En-lai as part of an ambivalent and jagged encounter. Contrary to this is the illustration of the Cultural Revolution in *On China* (2011) which indicates immediate interest in the topic as it has been raised, hence the United States has only been an outside observer of the event. Kissinger proposes and immediately answers why the topic is significant for both the United States and the success of the meetings, which elements are absent, not even implied in the memorandum:

Why present such a narrative to an American delegation on the first visit from the United States in two decades? Because the objective was to go beyond normalization to what our interlocutors called friendship, but which would be more accurately described as strategic cooperation. For that, it was important to define China as a country that had overcome its turmoil and was therefore reliable.⁶⁶

This narrative amplifies the significance of the Cultural Revolution as a topic on the agenda of the secret trip to China as a necessary preemptive for the two countries to establish a valid ground for global coordination. Another discrepancy appears in the context of Taiwan, which was an inconsistency revealed in the comparison of the previous document equally. As stated before, the 1971 memorandum reveals Chou En-lai's firm stance in demanding China's sovereignty over the Republic of China centralized in Taiwan, requiring the acknowledgement of the United States. Opposed to this is the book's presentation which demonstrates the Taiwan discussion as a more carefully balanced act of diplomacy despite deeply rooted ideological standpoints from both sides: "[i]n the initial exchange, Zhou indicated that he was open to any sequence of discussion I might suggest—in other words, Taiwan no longer needed to be discussed, much less settled first."⁶⁷ In this recollection, Kissinger does not deny the central importance of the Taiwanese questions, however, he emphasizes that both sides came to the conclusion that other negotiations can be made first, without extensive need for immediate agreement over the issue. In essence, discrepancies become apparent in the comparative analysis of the documents in terms of the Cultural Revolution and Taiwan. The former is recollected as not only a more important topic during the negotiations, but one of generally higher importance in the question of future alignment of international order, whilst the latter appears as less of a direct, indispensable Chinese demand and more of a complex diplomatic question to resolve.

66. Kissinger, *On China*, 216.

67. Kissinger, *On China*, 214.

Third, different conclusions can be drawn when considering the potential motives for inconsistencies in the memorandum reported only a few days after the secret meeting and the book, *On China* (2011) investigating Soviet-American relations as a whole. When it comes to Kissinger's self-description, he manages to find a careful balance to show his own share of contribution at the same time as showcasing President Nixon's strategic foresight. This attitude creates a sense of collaboration and mutual success which the two politicians conducted in complete secrecy outside the knowledge of other members of the White House, signifying the triumph of their partnership. The amplified significance of the Cultural Revolution becomes clear in the book, which could be a result of its aim to provide an overarching view of foreign policy between the U.S. and China. The document places heavy focus on cultural and historical context throughout the exploration of major events, this could have led to an adjustment in the presentation of such topics during the secret meetings. The differing presentation of Taiwan could derive from an initiative to emphasize gradualism and mutual understanding between the officials of the counterparts. As Kissinger wrote *On China* in 2011, his perspective could have evolved over the forty years that have passed since the negotiations, especially since the U.S. and China established stronger ties and he had conducted over fifty visits to the country. Another reason for this approach could be the passing of the UN vote which rejected Taiwan from joining under the name Taiwan and further accepted the legitimacy of the People's Republic of China based on the *United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2758 (XXVI)*.⁶⁸ As this resolution was passed in 2007, it could have increased the sentiment that the question of Taiwan is settled and therefore could have enhanced this manner of representation by Henry Kissinger.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research analyzes the discrepancies in Henry Kissinger's recollections of the rapprochement and investigates potential motives for distorting history through the evolution of his narrative and his self-depiction. The historical context proves the relevance of the topic, as the events of 1971 initiated the establishment of future cooperation between the United States and the People's Republic of China (PCR), a partnership that has significantly transformed and poses large questions in even contemporary foreign policy. By

68. "General Assembly Adopts Work Programme for Sixty-Second Session, Rejects Bid to Include Agenda Item on Taiwan | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases." United Nations, September 21, 2007, <https://press.un.org/en/2007/ga10617.doc.html>.

examining the books of Henry Kissinger spanning through decades from his time in the White House and after, moreover comparing them to his original report of the secret meeting in China with Chou En-lai from 1971, inconsistencies in his recollections can be examined. The analysis of the discrepancies reveals a wide range of possible intents that developed over the course of decades. First, the memoir *White House Years* (1979) gives an account that amplifies Kissinger's role as the pivotal negotiator, a potential aim to redeem his reputation after controversies of the past decade, such as the Vietnam War and the fall of the Nixon Administration. President Nixon's contribution is less highlighted, which might be motivated by a further effort for Kissinger to differentiate himself from his scandalous resignation. As for the direct description of the secret diplomatic mission, the book diverges from the transcript, as it contains a more personal illustration of the negotiations and places less focus on pragmatic questions, such as the case of Taiwan. Whilst Kissinger claims the issue was only discussed for a short period of time, the memorandum and the transcripts of the first meeting prove otherwise. Moreover, due to the personal tone of the book which seeks to showcase the events from the absolute view of Kissinger, the clear-cut factuality of the meeting is exchanged for subjectivity, which adjusts the representation of the trip's details, such as the PCR's protocol and arrival. This personal recollection that provides a less pragmatic picture than the memorandum is most likely motivated by the effects of personal opinion, a wish for redemption, and distancing from the direct connection to the Nixon administration.

Second, alternating from the personal memoir style of *White House Years* (1979) is the book *Diplomacy* from 1994, which provides an account of global foreign policy and places the secret diplomatic mission into this context. With the passing of Cold War immediacies and the approach of a new century, the reflections of Kissinger on both himself and the President differ from the account he provided in the book subject to the previous comparison. Kissinger praises the utilization of the realpolitik ideology, his own foreign policy perspective by President Nixon, whilst defining his own contribution and activity less. One could interpret this as a celebration of his own ideological triumph which was simultaneously peculiar to the leader of the country, who had enough courage to challenge previous, more traditional approaches. As for the secret trip's illustration, once again, inconsistencies can be analyzed and contrasted with the 1971 memorandum. The report paints the negotiations as a direct discussion of issues between the People's Republic of China and the United States, as opposed to the book's motive to contextualize the event in terms of its role in foreign policy as a

whole, resulting in a brief illustration, possibly downplaying its influence. Both discrepancies can prove to be dangerous, as the legitimacy and triumph of political philosophy are amplified, while the sole purpose of the secret mission is less highlighted, shifting the focus of the discussion. Be as it may, this aligns with the motivation of Henry Kissinger to demonstrate a framework with the panorama of large foreign policy ideologies and strategies.

Third, *On China* (2011), aims to analyze Sino-American relationships and their foreign policy, combining the personal sentiment of *White House Years* (1979) and the pragmatic ideological considerations of *Diplomacy* (1994). Kissinger highlights the importance of collaboration between the President and himself, showcasing his own share of contribution and Richard Nixon's strategic foresight equally. This notion amplifies the secrecy surrounding the secret mission, as the trip to China was conducted without the knowledge of White House members, exemplifying the partnership of the two figures. Nonetheless, discrepancies can be examined when comparing the document to the original report, such as the central role of the Cultural Revolution during the negotiations, contrary to its lessened significance as expressed in the memorandum. Another historical question, the presentation of Taiwan also retains an inconsistent recollection, accentuating the mutual understanding and less pragmatic negotiation between the two parties, showing a more balanced version of diplomacy. These distortions could be understood as a result of Taiwan's rejection from the United Nations, as well as the passing of four decades which allowed Kissinger to visit the PCR over fifty times, as well as the United States in general to establish stronger ties with them. To reiterate, Henry Kissinger's inconsistent portrayal of the rapprochement between the United States and the People's Republic of China results in an overarching development in the narrative of writing history and depicting his own role, from a factual representation of a memorandum through a highly personal and subjective, or quite the contrary, an extensively diplomatic and pragmatic representation, up until a balanced combination of these aspects. As Kissinger himself stated: "what really happened is often less important than what is thought to have happened", nevertheless, this paper uncovers the discrepancies of his recollections regarding the secret trip to China in 1971, showcasing the potential motives behind distorting history and uncovering the evolution of his memory.⁶⁹

69. Ferguson, "The Meaning of Kissinger: A Realist Reconsidered," 137.

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