
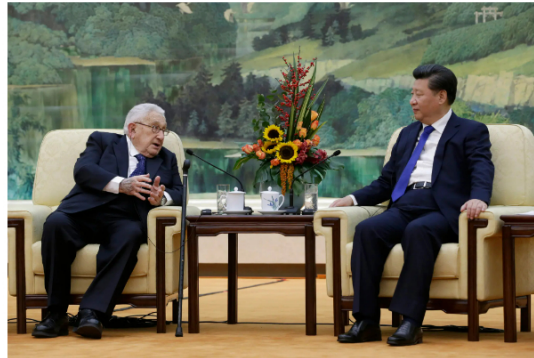


To Many Chinese, Kissinger's Death Ends an Era in U.S.-China Relations

In Beijing's praise of his legacy, there is implicit criticism of a U.S. shift in recent years away from cooperation and toward intensifying competition.

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Xi Jinping, China's top leader, with Henry A. Kissinger during a meeting in 2015 at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. Pool photo by Jason Lee

By [Keith Bradsher](#), [Siyi Zhao](#) and [Amy Chang Chien](#)
reporting from Beijing, Seoul and Taipei

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State media outlets hailed him as “China’s old friend.” On Chinese social media, people said his death marked the end of an era. They recalled his last visit to the country, in July, at age 100.

For many in China, Henry A. Kissinger represented a now-bygone chapter in relations between China and the United States, when the countries seemed to be moving inexorably closer.

Across Chinese state media, remembrances of Mr. Kissinger highlighted his role in organizing President Nixon’s pathbreaking trip to China in 1972 and advocacy over the past half century of continued engagement and warmer ties between the two countries. The 1972 visit led to the establishment in 1979 of diplomatic ties between Washington and Communist-ruled China; Beijing often highlights those years as an example of a golden era in bilateral relations.

At the Chinese foreign ministry’s daily news briefing on Thursday, Wang Wenbin, a spokesman, said that Xi Jinping, China’s top leader, had sent condolences to President Biden. Premier Li Qiang sent condolences to Mr. Kissinger’s family, and Wang Yi, the foreign minister, sent them to Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken. Xie Feng, China’s ambassador to the United States, [wrote on X](#), formerly known as Twitter: “He will always remain alive in the hearts of the Chinese people as a most valued old friend.”

China has sought to highlight the era of engagement that Mr. Kissinger represented as a counter to what Beijing sees as the Biden administration’s efforts to compete with and contain China. In July, China laid out a red-carpet welcome for Mr. Kissinger, including an audience with Mr. Xi.

“China and the United States’ relations will forever be linked to the name ‘Kissinger,’” Mr. Xi said to Mr. Kissinger as the two men sat side by side in cream-colored armchairs. “I express my deep respect to you.”

China highlighted the historical significance of that Kissinger-Xi meeting in its choice of venue. It was the same building where half a century earlier Mr. Kissinger had met Zhou Enlai, who was then China’s premier: Villa No. 5 of the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse.

In July, Mr. Kissinger also met with China’s defense minister at the

time, Li Shangfu, who had rebuffed multiple requests for meetings with his American counterpart. (This prompted John F. Kirby, a spokesman for the U.S. National Security Council, to [express frustration](#) that a private citizen had more access to the Chinese leadership than the government did.)

Mr. Kissinger, who visited China more than 100 times, “was viewed as a living legacy of the good old days,” said Wu Xinbo, the dean of the Institute of International Studies at Fudan University in Shanghai.

When Mr. Xi was on the cusp of power in 2012, he met Mr. Kissinger twice — [once in Beijing](#) and [then in Washington](#). In 2019, [Mr. Xi told Mr. Kissinger](#) that his “major contributions will go down in the annals of history.”

Mr. Kissinger figures in Chinese textbooks as crucial in relations between China and the United States, a leader who fathered an extended period of ever-closer engagement between the two countries. But with President Trump and then President Biden shifting American policy away from engagement and toward greater wariness, Mr. Wu said, Mr. Kissinger’s influence was regarded as waning.

President Trump imposed broad tariffs on Chinese goods, greater scrutiny of visa applications from China, stricter limits on high-tech exports to China and tighter monitoring of Chinese investment and intelligence-gathering activities in the United States. Mr. Biden has kept Mr. Trump’s tariffs and further tightened export controls. He has also bolstered military agreements with the Philippines and Australia as a way of countering China.

On Chinese social media, Mr. Kissinger’s death dominated search topics. People shared comments on Weibo, a Twitter-like platform, mourning the death of Mr. Kissinger and that [on Tuesday of Charles T. Munger](#), a prominent American investor who was also well known in China.

Mr. Kissinger is remembered far less fondly in Taiwan, a self-ruled island democracy over which Beijing has claimed sovereignty. There, he has long been blamed for his central role in shifting America’s diplomatic relations to Beijing from Taipei, and for failing to obtain a broad commitment from Beijing not to seize Taiwan. Mr. Kissinger was a frequent visitor to Beijing over the past half century, but he never went to Taiwan.

“Many people think that he was not a good friend of Taiwan, and I think there is some truth to that,” said Lu Yeh-chung, a professor of the department of diplomacy of National Chengchi University in Taipei.

“It is understandable that he cared about the interests of the United States,” Professor Lu said. “However, in this process, Taiwan felt that it was the party being betrayed. Of course it felt bad.”

Keith Bradsher is the Beijing bureau chief for The Times. He previously served as bureau chief in Shanghai, Hong Kong and Detroit and as a Washington correspondent. He has lived and reported in mainland China through the pandemic. [More about Keith Bradsher](#)

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