Abstract: This article intends to review Henry Kissinger’s book: “On China.” With the rising of China as an economic power and the decline of the American position, the United States is no longer alone on the leading of the international system. Since China has stepped in, the two States need to learn how to share the new international era and make efforts to maintain global peace and order. In this respect, diplomacy has and will continue to play an essential role. Described by the eyes of an American diplomat, this book analyses the history of the Sino-American relations, and its consequences for the global balance of power.

Keywords: Diplomacy, Chinese Foreign Policy, US-China relations, international order.
Tse-Tung feared a devastating Soviet attack, which encouraged a tactical alliance of China with the American imperialist enemy. Diplomatic efforts from both sides began, to slim differences and arrange the way for the possible cooperation on the international scene.

The first three chapters are dedicated to a brief historical retrospective of China and its singularities: “China was considered the center of the world, the Middle Kingdom, and other societies were assessed as gradations from it” (page 10). The author analyses from Confucianism to the Opium War, including the challenge of Japan: “unlike most of China’s neighbors, Japan had for centuries resisted incorporation into the Sinocentric world order” (page 77). And he explains the new era of warring states, that ended up with China being united again, “under the newly proclaimed People’s Republic of China.” A total of 90 pages of historical retrospective until the Communist Revolution led by Mao Tse-Tung. From the 4th chapter till the 7th, various crises were experienced by the “Middle Kingdom” such as the Sino-Indian War, the Cultural Revolution, the Sino-Soviet split and the Sino-American confrontations.

Mao invites President Nixon to a meeting in Beijing that was going to be held next year (1972) and China and the United States start to come to reconciliation: “Within a year, Sino-American diplomacy had moved from irreconcilable conflict to a visit to Beijing by a presidential emissary to prepare a visit by the President himself” (page 234). And in chapter 9, it is possible to notice the unfolding of the American strategy in the first meetings between the diplomat Kissinger, the Premier Zhou En-lai, President Nixon, and Chairman Mao. The meetings were held in secret and they were decisive for the normalization of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The pragmatic premier Zhou oversaw the delegation and Kissinger attributes to him exceptional intellectual and personal qualities that proved decisive for the success of the delicate negotiations.

A lot of subjects were discussed, inclusive sensitive issues related to Taiwan: “In 1971 (…) the United States did not recognize Beijing as the capital of China. China and America had no diplomats in each other’s capitals and had no direct way to communicate with each other.” And to Vietnam: “the second anomaly was the Vietnam war. Part of my task was to achieve Chinese understanding for a warn America was fighting on China’s border against an ally of China” (page 248). In the end, “the secret trip began the delicate process by which the United States has step by step accepted the one China concept, and China has been extremely flexible about the timing of its implementation” (page 250).
In chapter 10, the author discusses the idea of a “Quasi-Alliance” that resulted from the conversations between Nixon and Mao and “the basis for the quasi-alliance had been the Chinese conviction that the United States’s contribution to global security was indispensable. Beijing had entered the relationship looking to Washington as a bulwark against Soviet expansionism” (page 293).

From chapter 11 to chapter 17, Kissinger covers a role of events: the end of the Mao Era, Deng’s ascendance and the opening reform, the Third Vietnam War, Deng’s visit to America and the new definition of alliance, Tiananmen Square, the economic reforms and the political results of the disintegration of the Soviet Empire.

Finally, in the last chapter (chapter 18), Kissinger describes a turning point in Sino-America relations, marked by the end of Jiang Zemin’s presidency. He points out that “the millennium was the symbolic beginning of that new relationship. A new generation of leaders had come into the office in China and in the United States” (page 487).

With the rising of China as an economic power and the decline of the American position, the United States is no longer alone on the leading of the international system. “The rise of China is not primarily the result of its military strength. It reflects importantly a declining American competitive position” (page 546). Since China has stepped in, the two States need to learn how to share the new international era and make efforts to maintain global peace and order. Kissinger's opinion on this matter is that “in the new globalized, interconnected world rife with weapons of mass destruction, China and the United States must also focus on a shared, long-term stake in the international system.” He continues: “building strategic trust and engaging in discussion of mutual restraint will prove a difficult, occasionally ambiguous process. Yet major powers in the contemporary era have no more important responsibilities” (page 547).

After reading “On China” it is possible to perceive the attempt of the author to bring the reader closer to the decision-making process. A process that is not impartial and is always tied to the view of an American diplomat. It is important to the reader to have a critical eye on his statements that often go back to his memory and to events in which there is no documentation as reference (only some pictures between the pages 172 and 173). It should be also noted that this book provides a complete and modern approach to the American and Chinese bilateral relations. It is a key book to anyone studying or interested in diplomatic, political and international issues.
The book remains an excellent work on the history of Chinese diplomacy which, unfortunately, does not provide us with many bibliographical sources. This absence of sources or the impossibility of access to them (must exist documentation by the US government on its diplomatic missions to China) marks Kissinger's work as an essential part of the US-China diplomatic relations history.