

The secret of Lincoln's Sitting Room

They are not much as pictures, but they are mounted now in an album in a corner of Henry Kissinger's office—a touristic record of his 49 hours in Peking. From time to time, Kissinger gets up to look at them and, oddly for him, falls silent as he looks. The hours of euphoria and \$40 wine have passed. The long, tough road to China lies ahead. Neither President Nixon nor Kissinger, the architect of this amazing turn in human affairs, is yet sure what forces have been loosed. That is why the President last week began a campaign of caution. In the Cabinet Room early Monday with the congressional leaders of both parties, he talked of the need to restrain expectations. Then he told the cabinet that now was a time for politeness but also toughmindedness. His White House staff learned from him that they were all at a very important turning point in history, facing a society that had been closed for 22 years. Secrecy would be necessary. Through the week Nixon told others that the meeting between himself and Chou was coming about because of necessity—that the realities of power had forced them together, and that each expected to gain something from the encounter . . . but that success was not assured.

It is standard cocktail fare in Washington these nights to quote Nixon's diatribes of earlier years against the "Communist conspiracy" as evidence that a miraculous transformation has occurred in him. That misses the point. He has always been drawn to the Communist leaders and nations—in-

trigued, fascinated and ready to contend with them, as if he were a quarterback trying to figure out how to win the big game. Herb Klein, his friend and press counselor for 25 years, has among his family photos one of a thin, youthful Congressman Nixon posing in front of a stone wall in Greece in 1947. Nixon was there in connection with an investigation of the threat from Communism. Just behind him is crudely painted the hammer and sickle. It was the first lesson in his 25-year seminar on Communist governments.

His approach to this summit was a meticulously prepared presidential venture. Other men would have called in 20 aides to help. Not Nixon. He created a special world, walled away even from his own government. Only Kissinger was allowed in at first. Then Secretary of State William Rogers was admitted. Nixon worked in secrecy in the Victorian parlor in the southeast corner of the White House known as the Lincoln Sitting Room.

If political necessity is about to bring Chou and Nixon together, another necessity welded the remarkable bond between Nixon and Kissinger—two master planners, so different, yet so alike—two men now curiously isolated from their pasts. Nixon is estranged from his right-wing constituency because he is going to Peking. He is resented by liberals who must support the move but can't stand the fact that their old adversary brought it off. Kissinger has suffered emotional excommunication from Harvard and the Cambridge complex. His Peking success will not help in the petty, jealous atmosphere that so infects the Charles River.

At nights now, the two men are back in the Lincoln Sitting Room, ruminating, planning, writing, sometimes just talking for hours. There is a volume of more than 100 single-spaced pages containing every word spoken by Kissinger, Chou and the others. There is a separate 40-page, single-spaced account of those 20 hours that details every nuance and impression Kissinger gained, from how Chou's complexion looks to how his mind works.

Nixon is the power broker, the man of unabashed gigantic hopes, willing to cocoon himself from old allies, to offend longtime friends, to seek his objective with an iron determination. Two years ago, when the President flew around the world, he had an almost animal sense of things to come. Crew-cut Bob Haldeman came up to Kissinger as *Air Force One* soared over Asia and chuckled that "the boss" seemed to have it in mind he might be visiting Peking before another year was out. Kissinger bet that Nixon would be lucky to make it by the end of his second term.

But if Kissinger does not have as finely honed an instinct for events as his boss, he is nevertheless the President's inexhaustible and indispensable source of information about history, about nations, about the men who run them. Before Kissinger made his trip, Nixon would go to the Lincoln Sitting Room at night and digest the memos. Maybe toward midnight he would call Kissinger, and the President would then extract every shred the professor possessed on the issue at hand. Kissinger was the technician who could hold a problem up for inspection, examine it from every angle, raise questions and offer alternatives. They spent two hours together in the Lincoln Sitting Room and another three hours in the Oval Office just tooling the opening statement that Kissinger read to Chou. They composed ten possible communiqués which Chou and Nixon could issue simultaneously.

They studied Chou at long range. Kissinger sent to the CIA for the most complete and up-to-date biography of the Chinese premier. Because he feared secrecy might be broken if he explained why he needed material on Chou, he asked at the same time for rundowns on a lot of world leaders for his "files."

Once, they thought their special world had been betrayed. A small speculative item in the *New York Times* listed Kissinger as a possible emissary to Red China if relations were reestablished. Kissinger's unknowing staff kidded him about it. He bluffed by joking that "one of my admirers" in the State Department had drawn a circle showing the farthest a person could be from Washington and consigned Kissinger to a likely spot on its circumference.

By the time Kissinger was ready to leave for Peking, he felt as if he were almost a part of Nixon's brain, so thoroughly had they examined each other's minds. Kissinger flew off, and cables with Nixon's last-minute thoughts kept following him. Once in Peking, Kissinger was on his own—almost. At one session Kissinger, noting the constant references to Mao's thoughts and words, produced for his hosts the fat file of his own instructions with long, fresh marginalia handwritten by Nixon.

Kissinger found many similarities between the Chinese premier and the President. Chou spoke softly, like Nixon. He did not nitpick, a diplomatic device that Nixon scorns too. Chou expounded his ideology with fervor, but it never overwhelmed realism. Nixon does the same. Chou did not have to use a note in 20 hours of conversation. That's the way Nixon talks. The man in Peking and the man in Washington are infinitely far apart on issues and goals, but in a curious way they will not meet as strangers.

* See Kenneth Crawford, *LIFE* 26 Jul 71, China file.

