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President Xi Jinping

Robert Lawrence Kuhn

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HOST: Next to China's decision to remove presidential term limits from its Constitution, meaning President Xi Jinping can be China's leader for the rest of his life. Let's go live to Beijing to speak to Robert Lawrence Kuhn whose book is *How China's Leaders Think* he also hosts and co-produces the TV show *Closer to China with R.L. Kuhn*. Robert, start with this Xi Jinping thought, the president's political philosophy which is being written into the constitution. Pretty much everyone in China will have to follow for the foreseeable future. In a nutshell, what is it?

RLK: It's important to recognize that Xi Thought... was incorporated into the Party Constitution last October at the 19th CPC National Congress, and now into the State Constitution so it is the guiding philosophy of the party and of the country. There are a number of parts. I would pick three or four. Number one is the Party leadership of the country. Number two is "people orientation" — to improve the people's lives, not just material goods but wellbeing in terms of reducing pollution, anti-poverty. Number three is "national rejuvenation of the Chinese nation", which is called the Chinese Dream where China would become revived as a major country in the world, respected and prosperous and strong in all respects. Third, is a new approach to development, not just growth for growth's sake, but sensitivity to optimization, green, low pollution, sharing among different social groups so that you don't have the wild disparities of income that you now have in China. So those are the core categories, if you will. People orientation, national rejuvenation, new concept of development, and then internationally there's a mission statement —China wants to facilitate the building of a community with a shared future for all humanity, and China wants to make its contribution to the world as the country moves to, as they say, the center stage of the world. It's a very grand vision. The target date is mid-century, 2050 or 2049, which is the one hundredth anniversary of the People's Republic of China. It's a very grand vision and it is part of the reason that the determination is made that Xi Jinping, whose vision this is, is the person to continue the trajectory for the foreseeable future.

HOST: So very different from the current constitution, would you say?

RLK: Well, I wouldn't say it's terribly different. I would say that it puts into law, into the Constitution, what is in fact been the de facto position in China certainly for the last several years: that Xi, when he was made Core of the Party in October 2016 and his name put into the Constitution in October 2017, he became the undisputed overarching leader of China for the rest of, I would say, his sentient life. And this just aligns the position of the state with what the reality has been in the Party. Xi Jinping, to his credit, has been a great supporter of the Constitution and rule by law. And so what this [removal of term limits] does is that it puts the Constitution in line with the actualities which are determined by the Party. And so therefore the obeying of the Constitution is now consistent with what the actual reality is that Xi Jinping is the overarching leader of the country for the foreseeable future.

HOST: Many thanks, Robert. That's really interesting. That's Robert Lawrence Kuhn, his book is called *How China's Leaders Think* and he also hosts the TV show *Closer to China with R.L. Kuhn*.