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70th Anniversary of the PRC

Accomplishments and Challenges, Hong Kong

Robert Lawrence Kuhn [Telephone], October 1, 2019





HOST / Kristie Lu:
Now, Robert Lawrence Kuhn is, a Beijing-based commentator. He is also host of a show on CGTN, that is state run news network that comes out of Beijing. And this is our second conversation this day. Robert, just want to confirm that you could hear me. How are you doing?

KUHN: I can indeed. I actually live in New York and I've been to China about 200 times since the late 1980s. I have a kind of a diverse perspective.

HOST: Okay, my apologies - you're a New York-based but a frequent visitor of Beijing.





HOST: I just wanted to just get your thoughts on what National Day means this year. You know, 70 years, China has accomplished so much. Xi Jinping has accomplished so much, in changing, not just the economy and the military, but also the political makeup in his own power base here.

HOST: But we can't shake off those images of what's been happening in Hong Kong — the scenes of unrest and chaos, a political problem that seems to be so intractable. is Hong Kong weighing on this day in the minds of the leadership?





KUHN: Well, certainly Hong Kong here is a factor; as you noted, it was mentioned in both of Xi Jinping speeches, perhaps more than it might have been in other years. But it is not the overriding issue that we project onto China; the overriding issue is the great development that China has had over these 70 years — of course, it's really only 40 of those 70 years (but that has sort of slips by at this point).

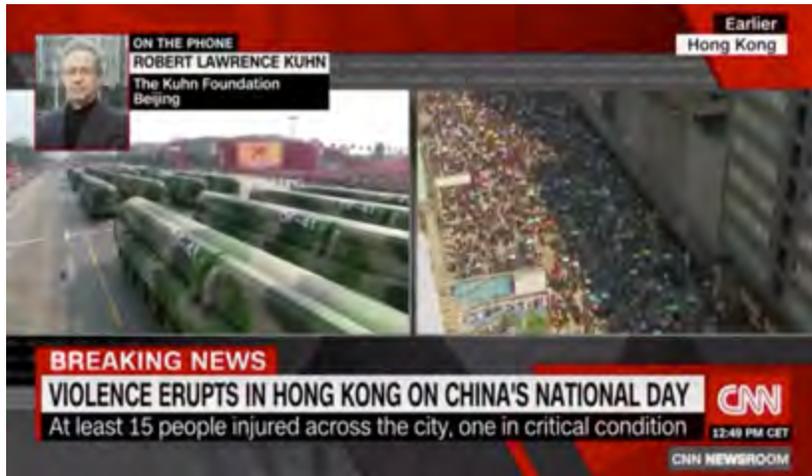




KUHN: And during this period of time, China has had probably the greatest economic transformation of more people than any other time in human history. The GDP per capita has gone up 70-fold (in constant prices). It's the second largest economy.



KUHN: But Xi Jinping stressed, expressed, last night in his speech that the most singularly important achievement has been the elimination of all absolute poverty — not all poverty per se, but all people living below the line of absolute poverty, a number that arguably is 800 million people over this period of time....





KUHN: ... and about 100 million people [lifted out of poverty] since Xi Jinping took office as senior leader — because the final 100 million were really the intractable poor, those living in remote mountain villages or infirm or minorities who don't speak the language or lacking education





KUHN: And there's been a tremendous effort made. And this is what he really emphasizes and is what he thinks is most important. That doesn't negate all the other things, but China is a rich and complex picture. And I think that we know we need to really understand that in its totality.





KUHN: The people are very patriotic. Most of the mainland people do not identify with what's happening in Hong Kong. They prefer, you know, a stable government that feeds them well and improves their standards of living.



HOST: Yeah, China as you say is a very rich and complex country. And Robert, I just want to ask you one more question: Does leadership... do they question why is it that since the handover that the hearts of the Hong Kong people haven't been handed over to China?

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KUHN: You know there are speculations about that, but China has a bigger vision. They issued a White Paper last Friday directly for the 70th anniversary. It gave great details about the tremendous development that China has. But here's the point: It went out of its way to say this benefits the world.



KUHN: So, this White Paper is an important document because it signals that China is not going to be defensive about what it believes its contributions to the world. And that that's a significant difference. So rather than being defensive about what's happening in Hong Kong, China is saying. "Here's how we're contributing to the world."





KUHN: Here's how we think we will do even more contributions. There are people who like to speculate that that there are black hands or foreign forces behind Hong Kong. But I don't think that's a prevailing feeling among leadership.



KUHN: I think that they believe that bringing economic development and political stability and stressing the nationalistic emotions that all people have — but maybe Chinese in particular because of the suffering that they have over more than a century, a century and a half actually, that this will be the prevailing theme and will carry China into the future.





HOST:
Interesting analysis and perspective of perhaps what Beijing's leadership is thinking as they try to just get through, or just understand the conundrum, that is the ongoing political crisis in Hong Kong. Robert Kuhn, thank you for joining us. You're watching CNN.

