



BBC World Service

Macao 20th Anniversary

President Xi Jinping

Robert Lawrence Kuhn

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HOST: Chinese President Xi Jinping has said his government will never tolerate foreign interference in Hong Kong and Macao affairs. Mr. Xi's remarks came in a speech in Macao on a three-day visit there to mark the 20th anniversary of the territory's handover to China. After more than four centuries of Portuguese rule, the visit is widely seen as a reward for Macao's stability and loyalty in contrast with Hong Kong. I've been speaking to Robert Lawrence Kuhn. He is a long-term adviser to China's leaders and multinational corporations. Take a listen.

KUHN: President Xi's full-voice, broad-spectrum endorsement of how Macao has implemented what China calls it's "one country, two systems" policy, and how Macao has prospered in doing so, really highlights what many people in the West do not understand — that this "one country, two systems policy", which we've often heard applied to Hong Kong now applies to Macao, is fundamental to President Xi's vision of national rejuvenation as the fulfillment of the Chinese Dream.

HOST: Fair enough. Macao is going to be like this. More than half of the population was born on the mainland. They're going to be more obedient. How does the "one country, two systems" sit alongside democracy.

KUHN: They are orthogonal to each other. They are not opposed. They are different kinds of things. Democracy, as we interpret it in the West, is “one person, one vote”, a free media, and an independent judiciary. In China, democracy is actually one of the so-called “socialist values” — but it's a different kind of democracy. It's a democracy where the party is in absolute leadership without any tolerance for competition...

HOST: Or any tolerance for dissent....

KUHN: Well, that depends what you mean by dissent. Yes. But what it means by democracy is that is that the Party has an affirmative responsibility to engage the population through polls, through online activity, to really get a deep sense of what the people need and want and to get feedback from the people about errors. Now there are certain limits to that. China would say the democracy of the people is to be free of poverty. [HOST: Right.] China is having the greatest alleviation of poverty in world history: some 850 million people — 100 million on Xi Jinping’s watch over the last seven to eight years — ending all absolute poverty by the end of 2020.

HOST: And that jars with Hong Kong where people are asking for freedom of speech and... [KUHN: Well, what they are asking...] Allow me to finish... It is a different place to Macao. Is China afraid that Macao could potentially turn into what we're seeing on the streets of Hong Kong?

KUHN: You know, I don't think China really fears that, because if you look at Macao, it is totally dependent on gambling and gambling is totally controlled by mainland policies in terms of allowing gambling there — and even 70 percent of the tourists come from mainland. So, there's much more integration of a natural kind, so there would be much less incentive for the vast majority of Macao people to think — in terms of their own benefit — for the kinds of freedoms that Hong Kong is concerned about.

HOST: That's longtime adviser to China's leaders and multinational corporations Robert Lawrence Kuhn.