



# CNN Newsroom

## Peng Shuai - Controversy

Robert Lawrence Kuhn, November 21, 2021

The screenshot shows a CNN Newsroom broadcast. On the left, a video call window shows Robert Lawrence Kuhn, an older man with glasses, speaking from New York. The main video window shows a tennis event in Beijing, China, with a blue backdrop featuring the 'HEAD' logo and the Chinese national flag. A man in a dark jacket is walking on the court, and several people in blue uniforms are visible in the foreground. The news ticker at the bottom reads: 'MISSING TENNIS STAR PENG SHUAI PURPORTEDLY SEEN IN NEW VIDEO AND PHOTOS'. Below this, it identifies Robert Kuhn as the author of 'How China's Leaders Think'. The broadcast is live at 8:05 AM CET. A video player interface is visible at the bottom of the frame.

New York

Beijing, China

MISSING TENNIS STAR

PENG SHUAI PURPORTEDLY SEEN IN NEW VIDEO AND PHOTOS

Robert Kuhn | Author, "How China's Leaders Think"

LIVE

CNN

8:05 AM CET

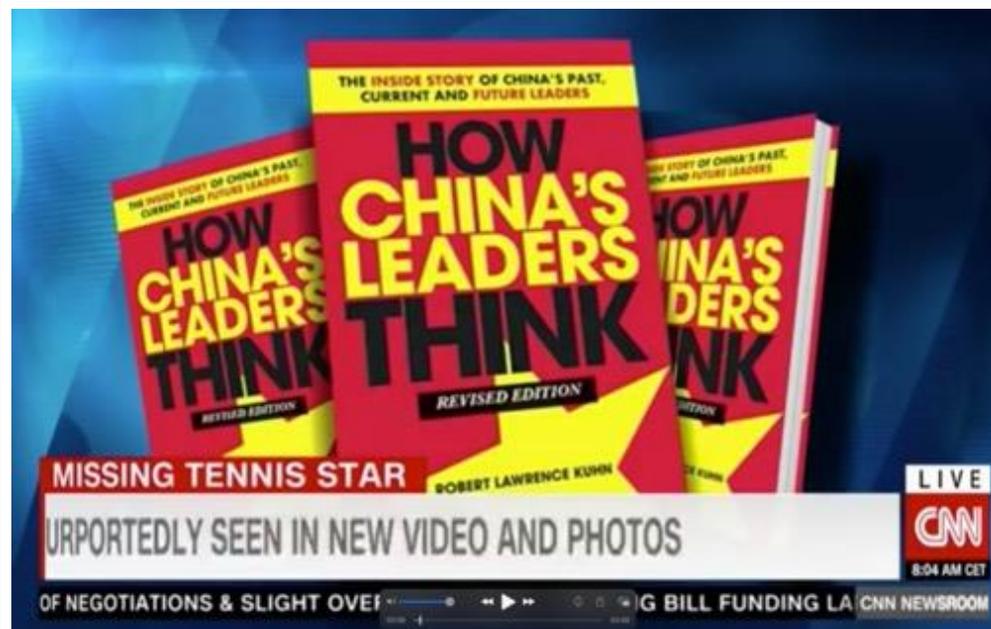
WHITE HOUSE

CNN NEWSROOM



**CNN Host – Paula Newton:** Joining me now, Robert Kuhn, who is a long-time adviser to Chinese leaders and multinational corporations. He is the author of the book, *How China's Leaders Think*.

And, good to see you again. What is disturbing about this story, for so many people – and as many people have applauded the Women Tennis Association, and obviously, for good reason. This is the point that I think, perhaps, most people miss. The key thing is how China interprets what the WTA is saying.





**Robert Lawrence Kuhn:**

**Certainly, this is unprecedented. It is a moving story; we don't know the facts — I assume the facts will, eventually, come out. Certainly, this is unprecedented in China, for an ordinary citizen to level this kind of accusation, against a senior leader, albeit retired, but nonetheless, a senior leader who is much revered in China.**





**Kuhn**: That said, the whole approach of China will be to protect the system. China believes that its system is responsible for all of the country's success: China is the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest economy, bringing 800-plus million people out of poverty — now, moving towards what they call, "Common Prosperity." All of these achievements, they say, are completely dependent upon the leadership of the Party.





**Kuhn: Party Leadership has been strengthened, recently, at their Sixth Plenum political meeting, which reconfirmed that the Party is in charge, that Xi Jinping is the “core” of the Party, and that “Xi Jinping Thought” will lead the Party’s ideology. So, all of that!**

**Then, we're heading towards the Winter Olympics, which is very important in China. Then, suddenly, this comes on the scene.**





**Kuhn**: So, China will do everything possible to lower the heat on this story, but, will not compromise its core point about the absolute leadership of the Party, which means that it will not be subject to pressures of, or make compromises with, the so-called “independence” [investigation] — what they say is “Western values”. I think that is the one thing we can be sure of.





**CNN Host:**  
The other thing I want to get your take on, whether it is the NBA, other professional sports, tennis, businesses — you are saying that the Chinese stand firm, but also, how do the Chinese people, usually, interpret what has happened here?



**Kuhn**: In past situations, such as with the NBA tweet about Hong Kong, or about concerns about Xinjiang and the Uyghurs and cotton, all different kinds of issues, the great majority of the Chinese people, I mean a very large percentage, support the government, and support the actions of the government: in Hong Kong, in Tibet, regarding Taiwan, in Xinjiang.





**Kuhn:** All of that, because it is based on nationalism. Nationalism is a powerful human emotion. We see it all over. In China, nationalism has a special potency, because of their sense of a century of humiliation — after China was the greatest nation, the most advanced in science and technology, had the greatest economy, for a millennium or more — and then they went into this abject poverty and humiliation. So, nationalism has this power.





**Kuhn:** So, in past situations, nationalism has trumped — pardon that pun — all other issues, in terms of relationships with the West. This, potentially, is different. Because this is not a nationalistic kind of view. It involves the Olympics, in some way, and it may transform into a nationalism. But, right now, it is not a nationalist point of view. It is, maybe, a prurient point of view — it is a kind of a soap opera — I hate to say that — but, it is different from the Chinese people's point of view than the past situations, which we think is the same.

**CNN Host:** Robert, always good to see you; appreciate it.

