

Robert Lawrence Kuhn: China's Political Leadership Is Optimum for Its Development

2021-08-25 Robert Lawrence Kuhn



The common root of China winning the war to contain the contagious coronavirus, and China winning the war to eradicate extreme poverty, is the CPC's leadership and organizational capacity.

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Editor's Note: On the publication ceremony of the book *Shared Ideals – THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF CHINA AND ITS CHERISHED FRIENDS FROM AROUND THE WORLD* held in Beijing in July, **Robert Lawrence Kuhn**, Chairman of the Kuhn Foundation, talked about his understanding of the CPC Centennial in his speech via video link. This is an excerpt of his speech.



I'm Robert Lawrence Kuhn. I'd like to share with you my experiences in telling China's story to the world and my views on the CPC.

I have been coming to China for more than 30 years. I have traveled all across China, visiting over 100 cities, with my long-term partner, Adam Zhu, for research and interviews, books and essays, television and documentaries. I have given thought, over the years, as to what has brought about China's developmental miracle. Consider twelve principles.

One, a people who work long and hard to improve the lives of their families and the destiny of their country.

Two, the prioritization of economic and social development over ideological rigidity.

Three, a one-party-leadership system (what is called “the multiparty cooperation and political consultation under the leadership of the CPC”) that enforces political stability and media control, and encourages economic development and social enhancement.

Four, a one-party-leadership system that is structured in hierarchical administrative levels — under the central government, provincial, municipal, county, township, and village.

Five, a one-party-leadership system that prioritizes selection, training, monitoring and inspection of key personnel, inculcating a high degree of administrative and managerial professionalism.

Six, a one-party-leadership system that solicits, and pays attention to expert opinion, whether in the Party or not, as exemplified by the increasing social power of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference.

Seven, a one-party-leadership system that solicits, and pays attention to public opinion.

Eight, the setting of long-term goals, mid-term objectives, and short-term policies that are monitored and modified continuously; policies that need long-term commitment have long-term commitment.

Nine, a way of thinking that experiments and tests new policies before implementation and rolling them out.

Ten, a one-party-leadership system that leverages industrial planning and state capital to gain economies of scale and competitive advantage.

Eleven, a one-party-leadership system that provides checks and balances via anti-corruption institutions.

And twelve, a one-party-leadership system that is willing to admit and correct errors.



Young people pose for photos at the site of the first National Congress of the Communist Party of China in Shanghai, east China, May 4, 2021. (Photo/Xinhua)

For the world to understand China, the world must understand the Party's way of thinking — in other words, first, why the CPC asserts that the Party's continuing political leadership is optimum for China's development, and, second, why the CPC asserts that the Party's robustness depends on its adaptability, self-regulation and strict management.

President Xi stresses the theme of "not forgetting the Party's original intention and keeping in mind the mission", which, Xi says, is the self-revolution of the Party under the new historical conditions. President Xi states that the CPC should be governed by standardized rules and procedures that are open to public

oversight. Only by adapting continuously, focusing on real-world issues, can the Party construct a truly prosperous society that is sustainable.

The Party-led system involves effective feedback mechanisms, such as polling to discern what people think, for example about proposed new policies. So, even though there are no elections in the Western sense, there is a good deal of feedback from different constituencies. Another example is when officials are nominated to new positions, there is often a period of time for feedback from colleagues, subordinates and superiors.

Moreover, the work reports of Party leadership at Party congresses every five years, and the work reports of the government at the National People's Congress every year, reflect a great deal of input and suggestions from all relevant officials, experts and constituencies.

These work reports are not just what top leadership puts together for form and ceremony. No — they are drafted by many teams, and feedback and opinions are solicited from numerous officials and experts; the documents circulate iteratively many times during a six-to-eight-month period or more of their drafting. So, my friends in China ask, why does the world misunderstand the CPC? The problem I argue is partly semantics because the English word "party" co-nodes in democratic political systems.



The fourth session of the 13th National People's Congress (NPC) opens at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, capital of China, March 5, 2021. (Photo/Xinhua)

A political party that competes in free and open multi-party elections such that a political party that does not compete in free and open multi-party elections must be exercising by force authoritarian control. This characterization misunderstands the whole Chinese system, which is founded on a different principle, where the CPC is the ruling party, not a competing political party. It is a dedicated elite from all sections of society consisting of just about less than seven percent of the population, but tasked to represent one hundred percent of the population.

For this reason, the CPC, as the perpetual ruling party, has a higher obligation to enhance standards of living and personal well-being, which includes reform, rule of law, transparency in government, public participation in governance, increasing democracy, various freedoms, and human rights. For those foreigners who marvel how China contained the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, with so few cases and deaths compared to other

countries, I point out that the common root of China winning the war to contain the contagious coronavirus, and China winning the war to eradicate extreme poverty, is the CPC's leadership and organizational capacity. This remarkable parallelism is a probative insight into China's Party-led governance system.

Now, all political parties, all political systems, have trade-offs, and while achieving national objectives is indeed an advantage of China's Party-led system, it is not the only criterion for evaluating systems. This is why continuing reform, opening up, and system improvement are needed.

"Continuing to improve" is the same guiding principle that then Zhejiang Party Secretary Xi Jinping told me personally in 2006. "It is fair to say that we have achieved successes," Xi said at that time, "nevertheless we should have a cautious appraisal of our accomplishments. We should never overestimate our accomplishments or indulge ourselves in our achievements," Xi stressed. He called for China to aspire to "our next higher goal," and to appreciate "the gap between where we are and where we have to go." He described this as "a persistent and unremitting process."

- CPC and Its Cherished Friends