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A medical worker conducts nucleic acid sampling in a residential community in Shijiazhuang, Hebei Province, on January 25, 2021. (ZHU XUDONG)

first came to China in January 1989 upon an invitation from Song Jian, then State Councilor and Minister of the State Science and Technology Commission. I was part of a delegation of American investment bankers invited to advise Chinese research institutes on their fledgling efforts to reform and adapt to the incipient market economy.

I was hooked the moment I arrived. The Chinese were curious, positive, and enthusiastic. They were eager to learn and improve their lives. "Entrepreneurship" was the new buzzword in China, and I knew at the time that the culture, history, politics and economics of the world's most populous country would eventually mean a great deal to America and to the world. What I didn't realize at the time was how much China would come to mean to me personally.

Most Sustained Developmental Success Story

It has been a privilege and pleasure to spend more than 30 years not only observing China but also participating with China as the largest population on Earth undergoes the greatest transformation in history.

China's development, primarily since the beginning of reform and opening-up, has been perhaps the most sustained developmental success story of any country on Earth. If one looks at almost every aspect of real life, Chinese people have higher standards of living and more personal



WHAT HAS BROUGHT ABOUT CHINA'S DEVELOPMENT MIRACLE?

By Robert Lawrence Kuhn

freedom than at any other time in their long history. Moreover, China's vast population is finally free from widespread famine, pestilence, and other social scourges.

I have given deep thought over the years as to what has brought

about China's development miracle. Consider 10 principles:

1. The people work long and hard to improve the lives of their families and the destiny of their country.
2. The government prioritizes economic and social development



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over ideological rigidity.

3. China's political party system, which is called "multi-party cooperation and political consultation under the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC)," enforces political stability and encourages economic development and social enhancement.

4. The one-party-leadership system is structured in hierarchical administrative levels – central government and five levels of local government: provincial, municipal, county, township, and village levels.

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

6. The one-party-leadership system solicits and heeds expert opinion, whether in the Party or not, as exemplified by the increasing influence power of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

7. The one-party-leadership system

solicits and heeds public opinion.

8. Long-term goals, mid-term objectives, and short-term policies are set, monitored, and modified continuously. Policies that require long-term commitment receive long-term commitment.

9. The CPC adopts the philosophy of experimenting and conducting tests before implementing and rolling out.

10. The one-party-leadership system provides checks and balances via anti-corruption institutions.

Although socioeconomic progress is never consistently linear and setbacks inevitably emerge, China's long-term sustained development reflects the long-term consistency of policy that characterizes the Party-led system of governance. Because the Party's leadership is in perpetuity, built into the Constitution, the system is very different from the Western model.

All political systems have trade-offs, of course, but one benefit of China's Party-led system is that programs that require long-term commitment can have long-term commitment. Party leadership can commit to policies for multiple years and even decades. For example, President Xi's 'targeted poverty alleviation' campaign required about eight years to eradicate all extreme poverty, a length of time that would extend far beyond election cycles in other countries. Other massive programs that demand such long-term continuity include Rural Revitalization, the South-to-North water diversion project, and healthcare system reform.

One process that China's Party-led system has used repeatedly is prototyping "test cases" – for example, the original special economic zones like Shenzhen and Xiamen. These areas were experiments in allowing foreign capital and expertise, differential wages, and other concessions.

But China didn't say: "Oh, such a great idea – let's open up the whole

country." No, that would have been dangerous. It took until around 1984 before leadership could concur that the reform and opening-up policy of the special economic zones was really working, so it could be implemented broadly. This principle of prototyping, monitoring, and modifying is an expression of Party leadership.

In recent years, free trade zones, beginning with the pilot in Shanghai and then, after three years of testing, dozens of others including the entirety of Hainan Province, shows how the principle is being applied. The essentials are long-term policy commitment and a commitment to make changes, fine or broad, based on real-world feedback.

Key to Success

In early February 2020, soon after Wuhan was locked down, I

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went on record in the media, both international and Chinese, expressing confidence that China would contain the escalating epidemic. I based my confidence not on prophetic gift but on China's success in alleviating extreme poverty, which I had been following for years.

I saw revealing parallels between China winning the war to control the contagious coronavirus and China winning the war to eradicate extreme poverty. The structural similarities between anti-pandemic and anti-poverty campaigns were striking: CPC leadership, General Secretary Xi's commitment, and CPC mobilization. The common root was the leadership and organizational capacity of the CPC that celebrates its 100th anniversary this year.

First, the operational leadership of

the CPC – not just giving directives and making pronouncements, but implementing programs and operating projects through the CPC organizational structure.

Second, the commitment of Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee – who sets an example that leaders and officials must follow. Almost everywhere Xi goes, he stresses poverty alleviation and encourages Party officials to visit impoverished areas regularly and interact with poor people directly. "For more than 40 years, I have worked in counties, cities, provinces, and the central government, and poverty alleviation has always remained an important part of my work," Xi once said. "I have spent more energy on poverty alleviation than on anything else." I can't think of any other national leader who has made such an assertion. Similarly, during the pandemic, when Xi visited hospitals and spoke with frontline workers, the whole country got the message.

Third, the mobilization capacity of the CPC – commanding the country's resources in personnel and materials. To contain the epidemic, the Party engaged in mobilization unprecedented in global health history: It locked down Wuhan and neighboring cities involving more than 60 million people, leveraged its grid management system of social control to perform house-to-house temperature checks, postponed the return to work after the Lunar New Year break for hundreds of millions of travelers, recruited major companies, state-owned enterprises, and the private sector to provide support and logistics, and assigned "sister" relationships between strong provinces and hard-hit cities in Hubei, a strategy long employed in poverty alleviation between eastern and western provinces and cities.

The efforts hearken to the success of China's targeted poverty alleviation campaign that has lifted about 100 million people out of abject poverty

✎ In Wuying Miao Village on the border between Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and Guizhou Province, Secretary Wei Guihua (fourth right) leads Party members and villagers to fix a river levee on June 30, 2019. (HUANG XIAOBANG)



✎ Yao Meizhen (first right), Party branch secretary of Tangdu Huayuan Community in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, discusses COVID-19 prevention measures with staff and volunteers on February 11, 2020. (ZHANG BOWEN)

since 2012. The project included complete relocation of millions of poor farmers from remote mountainous villages to newly constructed urban and suburban residences. Nowhere else could such mega-projects work like they

worked in China. And the reason they worked is because the Party-led system works for mega-projects. Going beyond the great good of poverty alleviation and pandemic containment, understanding how the CPC accomplished both provides

insight into the CPC's governance structure and organizational capabilities. This is especially important at this time of heightened awareness of China's increasing role in international affairs and the increasing sensitivities to it.

Those who recognize China's unprecedented success in both pandemic control and poverty alleviation must also recognize its causal relationship to China's overall Party leadership, and a strong, command-down, Party-led government. While achieving national objectives is indeed an advantage of China's Party-led system, it is not the only criterion for evaluating political systems. This is why continuing reform, opening-up, and system improvement are needed.

Facing Challenges

The CPC has continued to conduct innovative development and will face two types of challenges in the future.

The first type is specific issues that affect contemporary China including (but not limited to) growing the economy while controlling pollution, re-balancing standards of living between rural and urban areas with the Rural Revitalization program, demographic problems of an aging population and slowing birth rate, developing indigenous technologies despite US sanctions, and the like.

The second type of challenge includes specific issues related to the CPC as China's perpetual ruling party in a one-party-leadership political system, especially as times change and new questions arise. For example, how can citizens become more involved in the process of governance and the oversight of government? What's the relationship between the ruling party and rule of law? How best to balance the need for social stability with the importance of access to information in a knowledge-based economy?

The CPC is a "work in process." It will always be, and that is its strength. For the world to understand

China, it must understand why the CPC asserts that its continuing political leadership is optimal for China's development. One key is the Party's adaptability, with stress on experimentation and tendency to test new policies. But the CPC, as the perpetual ruling party, has a higher obligation to enhance standards of living and personal well-being, which involves reform, rule of law, transparency in government, public participation in governance, increasing democracy, and ensuring human rights.

General Secretary Xi Jinping once talked about the need to strengthen checks and oversight over the exercise of power, enable the people to oversee the exercise of power, let power be exercised under the sun, and put power in an institutional cage. Only by adapting continuously and focusing on real-world issues can the Party construct a truly prosperous society that is sustainable.

The Party-led system involves effective feedback mechanisms, which in turn can help fuel innovation and energize improvement. Real-time monitoring of results affects changes. The Chinese government uses scientific polling to get a sense of what people think. So, even though there are no elections in the Western sense, there is a good deal of feedback from different constituencies. For example, when officials are nominated to new positions, there's often a period of time for feedback from colleagues, subordinates, and bosses. And when new policies are considered, scientific polling assesses opinions and attitudes of those who would be affected.

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 each 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 the six to eight months or more of the drafting period.

These work reports are exceedingly important in the Chinese system. For the government, they assess the achievements of the past year and set the plans for the next year; for the Party, it's the past five years and next five years, respectively. So, there is this intricate and extensive feedback between experts and officials over many months alongside various field research and polling.

Understanding the process of drafting work reports of the Party and government is a good way to understand how China's system

How can better understanding of China be promoted to the world? My solution is honest, straight-forward, and in-depth communication.

works. If one simply states that China is a "perpetual Party-led government," it sounds rigid and aloof. In fact, the drafting of the work reports tells a different story. When one sees how the Party operates, including this monitoring, this polling, and this feedback, one begins to see how the Party implements change based upon the real world.

Telling True Stories about China

How can better understanding of China be promoted to the world? My solution is honest, straight-forward, and in-depth communication.

In a speech at a recent meeting of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, President Xi stressed paying attention to controlling the tone, being open

and confident as well as modest and humble, and striving to shape a reliable, admirable, and respectable image of China. Xi highlighted the need for greater efforts to construct China's own discourse and narrative, interpret China's practices through its own theories, and sublimate Chinese theories with China's practices. Xi called for new concepts, domains, and expressions to better tell China's stories and radiate the spiritual strength behind the stories.

President Xi's directives have been my approach, my personal modus operandi, for more than 20 years. Although in recent years attitudes in the U.S. have changed in one direction, and attitudes in China have changed in the opposite direction, I have not changed at all. I've kept consistent. I tell real stories about China including problems and challenges, decipher politics and policies, and explain how China's senior leaders think, which is often stereotyped or distorted in the West. Since early 2012, I have focused on President Xi's strategies, policies, and ways of thinking based on my conversations with him in 2005 and 2006 in Zhejiang Province to demonstrate the consistency of his philosophy and policies.

On December 18, 2018, at the 40th anniversary of the introduction of the reform and opening-up policy, I received the China Reform Friendship Medal from the CPC Central Committee and China's State Council, joining nine other foreigners who have contributed greatly to the reform and opening-up over the 40 years. It was indeed a great honor, but as I said at the time, receiving the Medal was less a reflection of my personal accomplishments and more recognition of the vital importance of telling the world the true story of China in all its complexity, dynamism, and richness through every achievement and challenge. ■

About the author | **Robert Lawrence Kuhn** is the chairman of the Kuhn Foundation and a recipient of the China Reform Friendship Medal.



Memorial hall of the former site of the Manchuria Provincial Committee of the CPC in Shenyang, Liaoning Province. (ZHANG WENKUI)

By **Tomoyoshi Kimura**

'CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS' GROW WITH THE WORLD

'As to what kind of society humanity will create in the future, I have a feeling that China will develop a new model for all.'