



BBC World Service
19th CPC National Congress
Robert Lawrence Kuhn
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HOST: To discuss the 19th CPC National Congress, we brought together Isabelle Hilton, CEO and editor of ChinaDialogue.net -- it's a bilingual environmental website on China and its position in the world, and Robert Lawrence Kuhn, who is host of Closer to China, a program on the China Global TV network. He's in Beijing and he's been attending the congress this week.

RLK: The highlight of the 19th CPC National Congress was the enormous elevation of Xi Jinping, putting his name, enshrining it, in the Party constitution. Whereas this may seem in the Western way of thinking a rather intra-party matter, which seems more form than substance, but in fact it has enormous substance in China. The reason is that the whole system of governance is founded on a political philosophy. You can argue about it, but it is founded on it. The country is run by the Party and the Party is based on its political philosophy. And by his [Xi's] name being placed in the Party constitution, along with Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping, singularly and in the middle of his term in office, basically it means that for the rest of his sentient life he is the originator of the current underlying political theory of the country and the arbiter of what constitutes correctness under that system. And so therefore the traditional way that you look at the standing committee in terms of alliances is out of the window, because, in essence, he is stronger than all other members, assuming there will be seven tomorrow which (we are pretty sure there will be). He is more important than all of the other six put together.

HOST: What does that mean, Isabelle, for the rest of the world – if they only have one man's opinion to go by?
[Isabelle answers]

HOST: So Robert, just a dominant political philosophy but an all-encompassing one—can you put it in a few words, what Xi Jinping's political philosophy actually is?

RLK: I can start by giving the overarching concept of what he defines to be the Chinese dream - as the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, which has two parts: The first part delivers to the people the high-standards of living that they need. Not just in GDP growth - but another big element at the Party Congress has been the so-called Marxist "Dialectical Materialism" approach to "Contradictions", or tensions, in society.



And that's been changed from just purely social and productive increases to give people more stuff, as it was under Deng Xiaoping, to now being more sensitive to their total lives, which includes pollution and not waiting in lines at hospitals, better food quality, and a whole bunch of things that are not measured by raw economic growth, that are qualitative measures not quantitative measures (by GDP numbers). So that's one basis of the first big category of Xi's political philosophy. The other, the second, is the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation as a nation collectively in terms of its place in the world. People speculate about, wonder about, China's global ambition. Well you don't have to speculate anymore. Xi Jinping told us, he said China is going to be at the center of the stage of the world.

HOST: A logical extension of what's happened at the congress this week is that in China's eyes, the way of running the world, according to everybody else is simply wrong. How much of a problem is that for internationalists – Isabelle.
[Isabelle answers, RLK back on 06:28]

HOST: Robert, the vast majority of Chinese citizens are actually being made richer under Xi Jinping's system. That's of course in his favor and in terms of his popularity great news, isn't it?

RLK: For sure. His two top signature programs both start with the prefix "anti": one is anti-poverty and the other is anti-corruption. Anti-corruption is widely popular with the people because they have all seen their local party secretaries in their counties or villages, taking advantage to benefit themselves and their families, both financially and in every other way. And Xi Jinping is undercutting all of that so that's greatly popular. The anti-poverty campaign is a desire to bring everybody in China above a certain poverty line – this is one of the goals of the "moderately prosperous society" which is China's first so-called "centenary goal". It's the 100th anniversary of the Communist Party in 2021 - so 2020 is his target date for this first stage, moderately prosperous society. And the theory is that even if China's GDP per capita is at a certain level, which was defined about ten years ago or so, if China still has people living in abject or extreme poverty, China can still not be a moderately prosperous society. So Xi Jinping put an anti-poverty program into place several years ago. Those two programs – anti-corruption and anti-poverty - have great support among the people. And many people I talk to will say, "We know we don't have democracy, we know we're not free compared to the West, but the tradeoff, at least for the foreseeable future, is worth it."

HOST: Final question to both of you, Robert first. Should the rest of the world be reassured or worried by the congress in Beijing this week?

RLK: I wouldn't use either term. I think the rest of the world should appreciate in the sense of understanding what is happening in China. I think recognizing that a successful China is extremely beneficial to the world, but be wary of what may happen between now and then.