



## **BBC World Service**

### ***Xi Jinping: The Governance of China***

**Robert Lawrence Kuhn**

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HOST: China's President Xi Jinping has a new book, "The Governance of China." Here to tell us about it is Dr. Robert Lawrence Kuhn, long-time advisor to the Chinese government and author of "How China's Leaders Think". Dr. Kuhn: What is the significance of the "Governance of China" by President Xi?

KUHN: The book is really a remarkable publication, two years into President's Xi Jinping's leadership. I look at it from two perspectives: substance and symbol. The substance is what the book actually is. It's more than 500 pages; there are 18 different categories, presenting 79 of President Xi's speeches and commentaries. Eleven categories relate to domestic affairs, seven to foreign affairs; six have political relevance, affirming very strongly the Party [Communist Party of China] and Socialism with Chinese Characteristics. Six categories deal with people's standards of living; four focus on standards of behavior. There is one category each for deeper reform, economic development, advanced culture, social undertakings, and ecological progress. In foreign affairs, three categories cover diplomacy, three deal with international cooperation, and there's one on national defense.

The book as symbol, though, is a kind of the meta-subject here. This is the first time, perhaps in the history of modern China, where a leader has come out so specifically speaking about governance. It sends a subtle signal that the old way of gray-suited political consensus equality, consensus government, is not quite the way things are now. Xi Jinping has the responsibility of leading China in a new time where reform has to be deeper. Xi Jinping has determined that his primacy in leadership and governance has to be above being simply the 'first among equals', and this book symbolizes his emergence. This book, "Xi Jinping: The Governance of China" is a very powerful symbol, and as such may be perhaps controversial to some people.

HOST: Let's look at the symbolism, because I wonder what the motivation is beyond the setting out of how deep the reform is and even beyond saying that he is the first among equals. I wonder whether this is also to do with wanting to entrench his legacy already.



KUHN: I think that's fair, but for larger purposes. In order to achieve what President Xi has set out to achieve, he must think afresh. In terms of the transformation of the economy, which is absolutely necessary, a deep restructuring of the way of thinking in terms of the bureaucracy, in terms of their service, in terms of the so-called 'four forms of decadence: formalism, bureaucratism, hedonism and extravagance', as they've said, as well as the dramatic change in the structure of society, and the emergence of China as a major world power—all of that, in order to achieve all of that and make the changes necessary, you need the vision to think about legacy. In order to bring about the conditions that will give you a chance to make these fundamental and multifaceted changes—because the changes need to be so profound—a grand vision is needed.

HOST: What about the potential for getting an insight into the possibility of political reform?

KUHN: The way it looks now is that political reform—as we would look upon it in the West, 'one-person-one-vote' elections and multi-party democracy—is not on the agenda. In fact, it's on the 'not-to-do-agenda.' However, to say Western-style political reform is not on the agenda is not to say that there is no political reform. Not at all. In fact, there is very substantial reform; for example: the judiciary, which has been the absolute lapdog of the party in local areas will now report to the national judiciary, not to the local party and government. This does not make the judiciary independent of the Party totally (nationally), but by not reporting to local officials, the judiciary is now effectively separated from and independent of political pressures at the local level.

KUHN: So, Xi Jinping is looking to bring about deep political reform, it's just not the political reform that we in the west normally think important. And frankly, there are somethings that while they may be reformed in terms of the market, they are not going to be reformed politically, particularly the media. Media—social media, traditional media—they have been actually made stricter, because you can't in the modern world effectively have one-party rule and have a free press as we have in the West. So there are tradeoffs, and you can see from President Xi's book, in terms of his vision of the governance of China, that he truly believes that for the good of the Chinese people, for the revitalization of the country, for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation in a grand sense as well as in an individual sense, that the Party [CPC] needs to maintain its one-party rule, at least for the foreseeable future. President Xi is committed to broad policies of reform in the economy and society, which must be very strongly



implemented. Moreover, Xi promotes higher standards of morality and behavior, which need to be inculcated into the populous by looking back to China's traditional culture, particularly to Confucianism, while at the same time bringing China into the highest levels of the contemporary world scene.

China wants to have leading companies in every industry of importance. China wants to be among the leaders because this is what China's heritage is. You can see in Xi Jinping this deep patriotism, nationalism, and a deep confidence in China. He is also consistent in his convictions. I first met Xi Jinping in 2005, spent time alone with him in 2006 when he was Party Secretary of Zhejiang Province, and he was saying many of these same things. He said in 'words of one syllable' that while we have all these correct political theories, but you've got to make things work in the real world. You have to focus on real results, and getting people to do what is right.

HOST: He must be thinking about the real world today. We're talking on day 5 of the protests in Hong Kong – the "one country-two systems" seems to be something he may wish to renege on.

KUHN: From the Chinese government's point of view, and from President Xi's, I'm sure that their hope and desire is for the local authorities in Hong Kong to take 100% care of it—but I would be shocked if there would be any changes made to what China has said, which is that Hong Kong can vote for whomever they want as long as whomever they want is on the approved list. The threat of course is that on either side of this there is trouble. Either you are very tough and you don't make any changes and risk confrontation. On the other hand, if you do make changes, what you say is that you are admitting that the power of the street can influence decisions or force negotiations—and for Chinese leadership the latter is the bigger "wrong". They will not want that to happen, they will not want that to set a precedent for the rest of China. What they want to see is Hong Kong flourishing and becoming a positive example so that eventually Taiwan will see the example of Hong Kong and will want to have some kind of a "one country-two systems" union with China the way Hong Kong does.

HOST: Is this book going to be a bestseller?

RK: I think people will be interested in hearing from President Xi himself. What we have in China is one of the greatest experiments in human history, for which there is no precedent. And so, people would be well-advised to understand this book and to see it as a symbol of where China wants to go.