

# CNN International “World Report” – March 25, 2013



China expert and author Robert Lawrence Kuhn discusses the significance of Xi Jinping's trip to the BRICS Summit in South Africa with host John Vause.

KUHN: This is significant, extremely symbolic. And in today's world, with 24/7 media, symbolism is substance. Let's look at this from two perspectives, internationally and domestically. From the international point of view, Xi Jinping is coming out strong. He's sending a message that China will no longer be subject to the agenda of the U.S. and other Western countries. From now on, China will be part of the group that sets the agenda for international activities, and this means economically, politically, diplomatically.



From the domestic point of view, it's a more subtle message. It's showing that this leadership is very strong and is very nationalistic. Xi Jinping's vision of the Chinese Dream is the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, which has both domestic and international elements. And because Xi and Li Keqiang, the new premier, will want to enact significant economic reforms, which will go against vested interest in China, they have to inoculate themselves against being charged of “too Westernized,” or soft on America. So they need to put a strong nationalistic stake in the ground, which will enable them to conduct deeper domestic reforms in the future.



HOST: How are the BRICS part of this new world order, this China dream that Xi Jinping has? BRICS economies are not where they were in the heady days before the financial crisis. Hasn't it taken some of the shine off their power?

KUHN: The whole world is underperforming. But there's no question that the BRICS, particularly China, India, even Russia, will be having an increasingly higher percentage of the world's GDP in the future. That's inevitable: no matter what happens in the short term, this will happen. That said, the power of the BRICS today is really not that strong. We recognize that this summit is more symbolic. They want to create a new bank to balance out the World Bank, which is controlled by the West. That's rich with symbolism. But if you look at each of the BRICS nations, they may have this superficial collegiality, but they have very different kinds of interests. Even between China and Russia, there are tensions on the border, tensions on the kind of military technologies that China can or cannot use, such as source code. There are many tensions between these countries. This is a real issue, and China is sensitive to it.



Listen to what Xi Jinping is saying now. China is not just going to buy African natural resources and sell them manufactured products, which some Africans say would keep them perpetually as underdeveloped countries, if because of China's cheap goods they can't develop their own manufacturing. So even though trade between China and Africa is \$200 billion a year and growing, there are deep-seated tensions, and China is aware of it. Xi Jinping, to his credit, stated it publically in his first speech in Tanzania. Previous leaders talked about the problem privately. So Xi epitomizes a new kind of leadership – very public, very open, very aggressive, and very confident. Xi Jinping is saying, “Look, we'll give you technical aid. We're going to train 30,000 professionals. We're going to give 18,000 students scholarships to study in China.”



So China is recognizing the inherent problem of asymmetric trade with Africa. And it is a problem. But China is facing it and really going after it. This is a new China that we are going to be seeing, led by new leaders.

