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**99th Anniversary of the CPC
Covid-19 — Poverty Alleviation**

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<https://youtu.be/uAgN82ux0ko>



HOST ZOU YUE: Let me start with you, Dr. Kuhn. There are things, a great deal of mostly negative attention and coverage in international media concerning China's leading party, the CPC, and its leader, President Xi, and his consolidation of power, some say? How should we understand these coverages and the narratives?

ROBERT LAWRENCE KUHN: It's very easy when you're looking at another culture to see it one dimensionally or homogeneously and almost always, that's not the case. As far as American views of China, China's views of America are very much the same. There are a lot of different strands that one needs to analyze to really understand that issue. Overall, though, it is certainly true that attitudes in the United States towards China are at historic lows as far as polling has been — something like two-thirds of the American population today are having a more negative view of China, which is the lowest it has ever been. So, worth analyzing why that's the case.

But to get a real understanding, one has to stratify Americans into general population, which I've just described, and the elite, and then the subclass of the elite who are those who have interests in China, who have business interests in China, or intellectual interests, or are so-called "China watchers", because they set the tone for every everything else.



KUHN: It used to be the case — it's a very interesting political analysis of the US — that within each major political party, Democrats and Republicans, there was more difference on China, within each party, than there were between the two parties. And I would say I can't think of another issue in which that's been the case. If you take anything — immigration, tax, welfare — the differences within the party are much less than the difference between the parties. That was not the case with China.

But we've seen a change, I would say beginning in 2015, maybe with a little respite, and then more recently, it's been accelerated by the pandemic — and the attitudes have become hardened. And this is a deep problem and it's a problem that is not susceptible to simplistic answers.



HOST: And Professor Zhang, I want your take on those. Of course, China, under the leadership of the CPC, has enjoyed probably more economic and even military powers. But in terms of philosophical power, those soft powers to the world, how can the CPC sell the message to the rest of the world? In the eyes of many still believe not necessarily a positive image of CPC.

ZHANG WEIWEI: In the first place, I'll make a small correction. I would not see the international media coverage, its Western media coverage of China, that is more negative than positive. In many ways it's regrettable. If one understand China today is the ABC of modern China knowledge that the CPC is an overwhelmingly positive force for China. That is the consensus of most Chinese. If you don't know that, you cannot understand modern China, China today.



And I just give an example. The latest was called the Democracy Perception Index. It is based on opinion surveys in 52 or more countries, conducted by a very mainstream Western research institution based in Germany and Denmark. 95 percent of the Chinese surveyed think their country has done a great job in fighting the endemic and, in other words, that the country is on the right track. It is the highest among all the countries surveyed.

I always say that to understand this CPC is to understand the nature of China as a civilization state. It's an amalgamation of hundreds of states into one, with a long history. And as a result, we talk about a one-party system — that's the grudge of the Western media, the Western view. In China's long history, over 2000 years, a unified into one state system. In most cases, China was ruled under a kind of one-party system, what we call a one-party ruling entity. And the CPC continued with this tradition and developed this tradition and leaders are selected by what we call meritocracy.

Yeah, if the Western system is about election, the Chinese system is about selection plus election. [Chinese] leadership is so competent, really, the West will regret if they continue to ignore the Chinese model. and China's experience. China is doing well. Come to China to see the proof Chinese made.



HOST: And Dr. Kuhn, about the competence issue. Obviously Covid-19 is seen as a stress-test on different systems. But do Americans share the same views and assessments about how the Chinese responded, how the Americans responded to this?

KUHN: You have to segregate the analysis of response to the epidemic, to be simplistic, into two time periods. One is the period of time between when it first emerged — wherever that was, there's some speculation — and the time where China made its decision, around January 22nd , or 23rd , to go for full lockdown. Clearly from that time forward, those who understand and follow China and follow the world, which is not a large majority of people, but those who understand, realize that what China did, the Draconian lockdown, was essential and was successful. Not perfectly successful, of course. But that model worked, and that model, frankly, can only work, as far as large countries are concerned, in China, because of the nature of the system.

So, the stress test of the pandemic in terms of once it came about, unquestionably, China had the capacity to do what is in the best interest of the Chinese people, indeed of the world.



The period of time before that is open to question. And here's where that those who are sophisticated about it would have issues. And the claim would be, in the West, that because of the nature of the Chinese system — the top down nature of it, and the concern of lower-level officials not to disrupt or not to do anything without approvals from higher levels, the lack of an independent media that could release information, that that number of weeks or days or whatever was detrimental.

And I think China has said that. President Xi has said lessons need to be learned, systems need to change. I think all that makes sense. I think the danger is because we're locked in this battle over many other things that the pandemic has sort of been brought into that, unfortunately, because I think the actual narrative of what really happened, there's really no blame. If a volcano erupts or an earthquake happens or a meteor hits — a pandemic is largely the same.

And human beings need to be allied in how they deal with it. But because of simplistic understandings, I think the divide is getting larger.



HOST: The problem is the simplistic thinking, because in the eyes of the Chinese, yes, we also do some soul searching and reflections, why the Americans haven't understood that. They should also we think about their systems where the fault line is, where the vulnerabilities are.

KUHN: No question. I think people are doing that. it's just the nature of the system when you have such a severe disruption of the system, only paralleled by an all-out war, when you're dealing with this kind of pandemic, that the system doesn't [react swiftly], because of its diversity and its independent checks and balances and independent sources of power, in terms of the executive branch, the legislative branch, the judicial branch, and certainly the media, those are all competing forces, if you will. And when you need to have urgent mobilization, whether it's a pandemic or a war, that system doesn't work as well.

But I think, to represent the views of my countrymen, that is not the only criterion by which a system should be judged.



HOST: Professor Zhang, let's talk about the Chinese Communist Party's plan. Because the Party has always been consistent in making plans and delivering on those plans. 2021 marks the date of the first of China's two centennial goals and also the 100 anniversary of the party. Do you think the CPC will deliver, as it always did, on the targets, a moderately prosperous society, per capita income in 2020 double that of 2010 and also the total elimination of abject poverty?

ZHANG: Yeah, I think China is on the whole well along the way to achieve these objectives. And if you look at the overall GDP growth, so eventually by this year China will be around ten thousand dollars per capita GDP, which means we met his overall target. What's more important is the fact that China has already created the largest middle class, real middle class, people with properties, with decent income, even if lower than in the United States; the middle class is over 400 million people.

And then in terms of fighting poverty, indeed it is impressive, because if you look at the official figures, roughly, we have about six million left in the category of abject poverty. So we are doing everything possible to meet this target. And this target by no means low, because in addition to this, whatever personal income level, there is a figure.

ZHANG: What's more important is this objective of what is called "Two No Worries, no worry about food, no worry about clothing. Plus "Three Guarantees" – guarantees for education, health insurance, and housing. So you put this together and then this would be a real wipeout of the abject poverty in China.



I visited quite a number of these so-called poverty regions in China. I must say the standards are reasonably high. If you put this so-called poor families into most developing countries — I've visited over 70 of them — maybe these poor families at this level, after lifting from poverty, really belong to middle class in most countries in the developing world. They have refrigerators, color television, smartphones, 4G service, housing and land.

So it is by no means easy. But we have and that is the greatest achievement facts in China's history. You wipe out the entire category of abject poverty, about close to 800 million. 70, 75 percent of the world's eradicated.

HOST: That would be a great contribution not only to China, but also to the whole world. Do you think?

ZHANG: Yes, that's true. And if you go to developing world, as most countries in the world are developing countries. The number one challenge is absolutely fighting poverty and fighting disease. And China has done well in this regard. This is also why, you know, so many countries are now looking to China, especially among the developing countries in Africa, et cetera. And this also causes some raised eyebrows in the United States as if this is a geopolitical competition. No, it's not China is pushing forward this model. Rather, when you are doing well, others come to you to look for help, for guidance, for inspiration, that's the case.



HOST: And Dr. Kuhn, probably that's one of the reasons for these strategic anxieties the Americans feel about China, because usually we been comfortable seeing tensions in trade, economy, technology. But now we have seen more and more jarring words of the US politicians against Chinese political system and its legitimacy. For example, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and also chief of staff of this White House, O'Brien, has been saying the Chinese system is corrupt and is repressive. Why that now?

KUHN: The extreme commentary one is hearing in the political system is largely a product of the political season that the United States has entered into in terms of the presidential campaign, and all of the individuals on each side making their comments because they all will have jobs or responsibilities that they would like to have in one or the other administrations.

To analyze the situation properly, though, one needs to go below that and not look at those superficial answers.



KUHN: I had the great privilege over the last five years of really embedding myself in China's anti-poverty campaign. We produced a major documentary called "Voices from the Frontline: China's War on Poverty."

HOST: Really impressive coverage.

KUHN: Which just has been nominated for a Los Angeles area Emmy. We'll find out if we win or not - but the nomination is good enough, there were thousands of entries. So, the appreciation for what China has achieved in poverty alleviation among people is very real. I mean, I've experienced that myself.

In fact, I've drawn an analogy, which I think is very strong, between China's successful, what China calls "targeted poverty alleviation", and China's containment of the coronavirus, because both are founded on the same system of commitment.



KUHN; I talk about three areas of commitment. First, the commitment of the Party which leads the country.

Second, the mobilization of resources. And how it is implemented, especially at five levels of local government: provincial, municipal, county and township and village under central government guidelines, of course.

And then the third is, frankly, President Xi Jinping personal commitment, which in the Chinese political system is exceedingly strong and filters down to all the officials.

So, with that in mind, you can really see, between China's war on poverty and China's war on the coronavirus, two extraordinarily positive exemplars of the Chinese system.

As I said before, that is not the only criterion to judge, but it is an important one. And I think a lot of people appreciate that.

I've had many, many people tell us that these are things they didn't appreciate, didn't know about China.



KUHN: China's anti-poverty campaign is exceedingly important — and to appreciate it, we should actually divide it into two parts. Because for the first, roughly, I don't know, 700 or more million people, it really wasn't poverty alleviation. It was economic development, from 1978 and the economic reform or development — a rising tide lifts all boats, as they say.

But roughly a little before President Xi took office at the end of 2012 — and he certainly emphasized it enormously — that no matter how big China's GDP would be, no matter how big income per capita, there would still be roughly 100 million people (as of 2012) who would never get out of poverty, because they lived in remote mountain villages or were infirm.

And so this targeting plan, which was very deliberately implemented, where every poor family has its own dossier and there's some local cadre, generally a young man who is seconded to a village for two years, to worry about every person.

It's a remarkable system that works. And the more people appreciate it, the more they will see that the objective of the party system, which is to improve the lives of the people.

HOST: Thank you very much, Professor Zhang, Dr. Kuhn. You have been watching Dialogue on CGTN.