

Editor's Note:

"Though the CPC's 100-year history has not been linear, there has been a vision, a dedication to bring about that vision, and a commitment to policies required to make it happen," said Dr. Robert Lawrence Kuhn (**Kuhn**), chairman of The Kuhn Foundation and recipient of the China Reform Friendship Medal (2018). He expressed to the Global Times (**GT**) his views on why the Communist Party of China (CPC) has been able to go through the past century with quite a number of remarkable achievements, why the CPC could turn the tables for China's destiny, and how the party has kept dynamic.

GT: What is your take on the CPC's success of repeatedly turning the tables for China's destiny?

Kuhn: In early February 2020, soon after Wuhan was locked down, I went on record in the media, 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 a revealing parallelism between China winning the war to control the contagious coronavirus and China winning the war to eradicate extreme poverty. The common root was the leadership and organizational capacity of the CPC that celebrates its 100 anniversary this year.

The structural similarities between anti-pandemic and anti-poverty campaigns are striking: CPC leadership, General Secretary Xi Jinping's commitment, CPC mobilization.

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 – central government and five levels of local government (provincial, municipal, county, township, village).

Second, the commitment of Xi, 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. 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, China's mobilization was unprecedented in global health history: locking down Wuhan and neighboring cities, 60 million or more people; house-to-house temperature checks; the CPC's grid management system of social control; postponing the return to work after the Lunar New Year break of hundreds of millions of travelers; recruiting major companies, state-owned enterprises and the private sector, for support and logistics; assigning "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.

Similarly, the success of China's targeted poverty alleviation campaign, bringing about 100 million people out of abject poverty since 2012, included the 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.

GT: In your opinion, what's the difference between the CPC and the Western parties that adopt an election system?

Kuhn: The CPC, the Party, is a "work in pro-

cess." It will always be, and that is its strength. For the world to understand the China, it must understand why the CPC asserts that its continuing political leadership is optimum for China's development. One key is the Party's adaptability, stressing experimentation and testing new policies. But the CPC, as the perpetual ruling party, has a higher obligation to enhance standards of living and personal well-being, which includes reform, rule of law, transparency in government, public participation in governance, increasing democracy, various freedoms, and human rights. President Xi states that the CPC should be governed by standardized rules and procedures that are open to public oversight. Only by adapting continuously, 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 effects 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, plus various in-field research and polling.

Understanding the process of drafting the work reports of the Party and the government is a good way to understand how China's system 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, this feedback, one begins to see how the Party implements change based upon the real world.

GT: The US and other Western countries have repeatedly attacked the CPC. However, such moves have increased Chinese society's support for the CPC. By being so aggressive with offensive moves, what has the West misjudged?

Kuhn: There are major misunderstandings and miscommunications between China and the US and other Western and developed countries, which have worsened in recent years. It is not a simple story and simplistic explanations mask real issues.

Though the CPC's 100-year history has not been linear, there has been a vision, a dedication to bring about that vision, and a commitment to policies required to make it happen. This way of thinking exemplifies Xi's leadership. To take one example, an important one, Xi makes the remarkable statement: "I have spent more energy on poverty alleviation than on anything else." I know no other national leader who has made such an assertion. And his example, drives officials at all levels to do the same.



Lawrence Kuhn
Photo: Courtesy of Kuhn

CPC leadership,
commitment and
mobilization
drive China's success:
Robert Kuhn