

HELSINKI FINLAND

China's development an epic story: chairman of Kuhn Foundation

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"The epic story of China's astonishing development is that of the largest population on earth undergoing the greatest transformation in history," said Robert Lawrence Kuhn, chairman of the Kuhn Foundation, in a recent interview with People's Daily.

The man, who has long been devoted to telling the world the real China he sees, told People's Daily that he has been encouraged by Chinese President Xi Jinping in terms of telling China's stories to the world.

It was the new ideas and philosophies, as well as the governance practices of the Chinese President that made him see the inside sense of China, he said.

During a grand gathering held in December 2018 to celebrate the 40th anniversary of China's reform and opening-up, Kuhn was awarded a China reform friendship medal by Xi.

"When I was walking past the center of the stage, President Xi reached over and down to shake my hand. During the photo session, he shook hands with me again and encouraged me to tell China's stories to the rest of the world," Kuhn recalled.

"Although I deeply appreciated the personal honor, I recognized immediately that the symbolism of the medal was more significant than my receiving it," Kuhn said.

Stressing that China is playing an increasingly essential role in every matter of global importance in today's multifaceted world, he considers it crucial to tell true stories about China and show the country's dynamism, richness and complexity in these stories.

According to Kuhn, he met Xi for the first time in 2005, when the latter was still serving as the secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Zhejiang Provincial Committee, and their second meeting was in New York a year later.

“Back then, we were helping the preparation of an exchange activity between Zhejiang and New Jersey. I witnessed Xi’s focus on economic development and entrepreneurship and his engaging with international business,” Kuhn recalled.

Kuhn is the author of *The Inside Story of China’s 30-Year Reform* [Chinese] and *How China’s Leaders Think* [English]. In his observation and writing about China, Kuhn came to fully understand the consistency of Xi’s governance philosophy. “The topics and policies President Xi underlines, such as poverty alleviation, common prosperity, innovation and environmental protection, are consistent with those he stressed as the Party chief of Zhejiang,” Kuhn noted.

In October 2014, Kuhn participated in the launch of the multilingual versions of the book *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* at the Frankfurt Book Fair, the world’s largest trade fair for books. He said this book is a milestone, which demonstrates Xi’s political philosophy and presents Xi’s way of thinking to the world.

Kuhn was deeply impressed by two of Xi’s speeches. According to him, the first one is Xi’s address to U.S. business leaders in Seattle in September 2015. “CNN invited me to comment on the speech live. From his speech, I realized just how much he values economic development and innovation,” Kuhn said.

The second one is Xi’s speech at a grand rally in celebration of the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China at the Tian’anmen Square in Beijing in 2019. “At that time, I was a commentator for the Chinese and international media at the square. I was struck by the powerful parallel structure with which Xi began his speech: three resonating paragraphs each beginning “Over the past 70 years...” stressing strong CPC leadership, economic achievements, and peaceful development. It was electrifying to the Chinese crowds to hear Xi expressing his historic appreciation of China’s past and presenting his confident anticipation of China’s future,” Kuhn said.

“His resonant remarks struck a chord with the audience, inspiring them,” he added.

Over the years, Kuhn has been studying Xi’s thoughts and the policies implemented by the Chinese government. He has written a large number of articles on such subjects as the five development concepts of innovation, coordination, green, openness and sharing; targeted poverty alleviation, common prosperity, and whole-process people’s democracy.

"All of these are new ways China rises up to challenges, and compose theoretically founded, policy-based Chinese stories," Kuhn noted.

China's targeted poverty alleviation is a remarkable story, said Kuhn, explaining that the country has lifted hundreds of millions of people out of poverty over the past 40 years or so.

"I was particularly impressed by Xi's words: 'I have always put poverty alleviation at the top of my work agenda and devoted much of my energy to it.' I know of no other national leader who has made, or who could make, such an assertion, a fact that I've repeated over and over again," Kuhn said.

In late 2019 and early 2020, the COVID-19 epidemic broke out in China. Kuhn expressed full confidence in China's victory over the virus. "I saw a striking resemblance between China's battle against the pandemic and its fight against poverty. With the firm commitment and leadership of President Xi and the strong mobilization, organization and coordination capabilities of the CPC from the central to the local levels, China will definitely defeat the novel coronavirus," Kuhn predicted at the time.

To promote regional and global development, President Xi proposed the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the vision of building a community with a shared future for mankind, which Kuhn believes are vital both for transforming less-developed countries and for contributing to global governance.

Countries around the world should work together to turn visions into reality, Kuhn said, adding that he himself will continue to observe China and tell stories about Chinese policies and people.