

THE

ROAD TO PEACE THROUGH AGRICULTURE WHILE CONFRONTING THE  
SINGLE GREATEST CHALLENGE IN HUMAN HISTORY

by

Ambassador

Kenneth M. Quinn, Ph.D.

Strategic

Advisor U.S.Heartland China Association

President

Emeritus, The World Food Prize

As prepared

for delivery at the forum on

“China and the World: Towards Building a Community with a Shared Future for  
Mankind”

hosted by

The.

**The**

**Single Greatest Challenge in Human History**

The

“single greatest challenge” that the human species has ever confronted is whether, - - in the face of such looming impediments as climate change, potential human, animal and plant global pandemics, burgeoning swarms of locusts and insects, raging wildfires and diminishing fresh water supplies - - we can sustainably produce and distribute sufficient nutritious food to feed the 9 to 10 billion people who will be on our planet by the middle of the 21st century.

To

build a “community with a shared future for mankind,” it is essential that two distinct objectives related to that “greatest challenge” are achieved: 1) policies and innovations to increase food production and its availability have to be enacted; and, 2)

given the severe disruptions to the global food system caused for example by the Russian conflict with Ukraine, it is absolutely essential for the world to remain at peace, especially between China and the United States.

One

of the best ways to help achieve both of these goals would be for those two countries - - China and the United States - - to carve out constructive ways to collaborate in addressing that greatest ever global food security challenge. This paper provides one

proposal for Sino- American collaboration that will link maintaining peace with uplifting agricultural production in Africa, which is projected to add one billion more people by 2050.

## Inspiration

### From the Green Revolution and Hybrid Rice

The

past 50 years, from 1969 to 2019, is the single greatest period of food production and hunger reduction in history. During this “Green Revolution” levels of poverty and malnutrition were dramatically lowered as was the incidence of famine.

The

story of this extraordinary achievement has been written in many places around the globe including India, Pakistan and the Middle East, but none more so than in China, which in the past five decades has gone through an unprecedented agricultural and economic transformation that cut poverty to near zero and dramatically increased food availability across the country, most especially in rice.

The

name most prominently associated with this historic advancement in China is the late Professor Yuan Longping. From his first astute observation in a field outside Sanya in Hainan Province to his break through scientific innovations in plant breeding at his acclaimed China National Hybrid Rice Research Center in Changsha, Professor Yuan was at the forefront of China’s epic development, a role that earned him the title of “Father of Hybrid Rice” and his receiving China’s highest recognition - - the Medal of the

Republic, presented by President Xi Jinping.

Reflecting

his array of extraordinary achievements in developing high yielding new varieties of rice, it was my great privilege to welcome Professor Yuan to Des Moines, Iowa, USA in 2004 to receive the World Food Prize, considered to be the “Nobel Prize for Food and Agriculture.” At the Laureate Award Ceremony, attended by leading scientists and experts from over 40 countries, the award sculpture was presented to Professor Yuan by Dr. Norman Borlaug, the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, founder of the World Food Prize and

the man considered to be America's greatest agricultural scientist and the "Father of the Green Revolution."

Standing

there together as they received the applause of the world's great scientific community, Professor Yuan and Dr. Borlaug - - arguably the greatest agricultural scientists of their respective countries - - represented the truly transformative power of agricultural

science to alleviate human suffering due to food insecurity. It was my incomparable privilege to work closely with both men for over a decade.

As

the world faces the great challenge of sustainably and nutritiously feeding the 9 to 10 billion people who will be on our planet by the year 2049, Professor Yuan's scientific achievements, especially in developing new even more high-yielding rice varieties, and Dr. Borlaug's similar advances in wheat that staved off mass famine and hundreds of millions of deaths in South Asia, will be a critical inspiration to the next generation of both plant scientists and political leaders to meet this new "existential challenge"

and to strive for peace.

**The**

### **Unique Historic Iowa - Hebei Connection.**

The

proposal being presented in this analysis is rooted in the American agricultural heartland, and specifically the American state of Iowa, where Norman Borlaug was born, and which has a unique connection to China.

In

2023, Iowa and Hebei are celebrating the 40th anniversary of their establishing a Sister State / Sister Province relationship. The centerpiece of those four decades is the historic visit to the American state of Iowa in 1985 by a young county level Party Secretary

from Hebei Province named Xi Jinping. A return visit 27 years later as Vice President and about to become General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party and President of the People's Republic of China—provides a foundation for enhanced Sino - American collaboration in agricultural research and rural development to face great global challenges.

## **Promoting**

### **Peace Through Agriculture by Upgrading Rural Road Infrastructure and Introducing New Seeds - the legacy of Roads and Rice**

My

own experience working in villages in the Mekong Delta in the 1960s, just as the Green Revolution was beginning, showed me the incredible transformative power of agriculture to diminish conflict in rural areas, while at the same time uplifting the well being of those farm families that utilized the new high yielding IR 8 rice seeds that had been developed at the International Rice Research Center in the Philippines.

In

addition, I learned the lesson of a lifetime when I observed that it was only in villages where the farm-to-market road had been improved that farmers used the new seeds. This linkage between upgraded rural roads and the expansion of agricultural production has been a constant factor in my analysis of every country I have visited over the next four decades.

Twenty-five

years later, as U.S. ambassador to Cambodia, I used that same formula of enhanced rice seeds and upgraded rural roads to finally eradicate the last leaders of the radical Khmer Rouge genocidal regime.

Based

on those experiences in my diplomatic career, during my 20 year tenure as president of the World Food Prize, I endeavored to highlight the significant relationship between agricultural development and promoting peace. Among my most significant actions in this effort came in my structuring our Borlaug Dialogue annual symposium in Des Moines, Iowa. Included were:

-

Focusing an entire symposium on global water insecurity in the Middle East, with Israeli, Egyptian and Palestinian experts as speakers;

-

Holding a session in our symposium featuring the ministers of agriculture of Afghanistan and Pakistan related to the war in Afghanistan;

-

Hosting the 2012 U.S. - China High Level Agricultural Symposium, that featured a keynote address by President Xi Jinping;

-

Including an agricultural scientist from Iran in our symposium and my delivering a keynote address at the Agricultural Biotechnology Research Institute of Iran, followed by my sending World Food Prize Laureates to speak at conferences in Tehran over the next several years;

-Having

“The Road Out of Poverty” as the theme for our 2017 Borlaug Dialogue, as we honored Dr. Akinwumi Adesina, president of the African Development Bank as our new World Food Prize Laureate.

Probably

the most impactful moment in demonstrating how confronting hunger can bring people together across even the broadest political differences came at our Laureate Award Ceremony in 2012. At that event, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon joined in presenting the World Food Prize sculpture to Daniel Hillel, an Israeli Jewish irrigation pioneer who had been nominated for our award by three Muslim scientists from three Arab and Muslim countries where Dr. Hillel had worked to improve village life.

**A**

**CASS - USHCA initiative leading to a U.S.-China Agricultural Dialogue in Des Moines Shows the Potential for Improving Relations During a Critical Period**

In

2020, having retired from the World Food Prize, I accepted an invitation from Chairman and former governor of Missouri Bob Holden to become a Strategic Advisor to the U.S. Heartland China Association (USHCA). During my participation in a CASS symposium, I suggested to Director General Dr. Wang Lei that CASS and USHCA collaborate in focusing on agriculture through a series of virtual “Ag Roundtables” using new Zoom technology. With Executive Director Ms. Min Fan leading the USHCA side, these virtual meeting

in 2021 drew praise in China and the U.S.

These

roundtables, coming during a period of severely strained government-to-government relations, provided the opportunity for constructive bilateral U.S.–China exchanges involving very senior heartland political and agri-business leaders, including Iowa Governor

Kim Reynolds, Illinois Congressman Darin LaHood, and the CEOs of major U.S. and Chinese agribusinesses such as John Deere, ADM, and Syngenta.

Based

on that positive accomplishment, we at the USHCA felt that there was no better place than the leading American agricultural states to promote the further collaboration in the agricultural research and global development needed to face that greatest global

challenge of our time, while also building a community for a shared future for mankind.

The

### **2022 U.S.-China Agricultural Dialogue in Des Moines Featuring Three Ambassadors**

The

idea for the April, 2022 U.S.-China Agricultural Dialogue in Des Moines grew out of the success of those “Ag Roundtables” and the chance to host new Chinese Ambassador Qin Gang’s first ever trip to the Midwest and Iowa.

It

was at that largely in-person U.S. - China Agricultural Dialogue in Des Moines, Iowa in April 2022, where Sino-American diplomatic relations took center stage. That event, carried out with support of the Chinese Embassy, featured three ambassadors— the Hon.

Nicholas Burns, the new Biden Administration envoy in Beijing; H.E.Qin Gang, the then PRC ambassador to the U.S.; and former U.S. ambassador to the PRC, the Hon Terry Branstad.

This

event was only possible because it was organized by USHCA and CASS - - the two non-governmental organizations that extended the invitations, - - and because it took place in the agricultural heartland, away from the politics of the national capitals. I referred to this approach as “bifurcated diplomacy,” reflecting that diplomatic officials were more able to accept an invitation from a non-governmental entity than to set up a direct bilateral government to government meeting. It is a type of “citizen diplomacy” for

which Iowa is well known.

That

Des Moines event was followed by the 2023 USHCA Agricultural Dialogue in St. Louis, with the Charge d’Affaires of the Chinese Embassy in Washington speaking and delegations from Hebei, Jiangsu and Shandong Provinces participating in person.

## **Ambassador**

### **Qin Gang Comes to Iowa**

When

Ambassador Qin Gang first arrived in Washington in the summer of 2021, Iowa’s Xi Jinping legacy came to the fore. The very first public encounter Ambassador Qin had with any American citizens was with Sarah Lande and me, two Iowans with direct connections

to earlier visits by President Xi to our state.

In

a 70-minute long zoom conversation with Ambassador Qin, Sarah recalled young Xi Jinping’s experiences in her home town of Muscatine, when in 1985 at age 31 he visited as part of a Hebei Province corn industry delegation. When President Xi returned in 2012,

I said that I had the privilege of hosting him at the World Food Prize. I also referenced my involvement with the first Iowa-China connection, when I escorted a delegation of Chinese provincial governors, led by President Xi’s father, Governor Xi Zhongxun

of Guangdong Province. This 1980 program was the first delegation of Chinese governors to visit America following the normalization of U.S.-PRC diplomatic relations.

During

our conversation, we encouraged Ambassador Qin to visit at an early opportunity to build upon our recent Ag Roundtables. Nine months later, in April 2022, the PRC Embassy advised us that an inaugural ambassadorial visit to the Midwest was being planned for

Ambassador Qin Gang, including his willingness to participate in an USHCA hosted Agricultural Dialogue in Des Moines.

Former

Ambassador Terry Branstad, who as Governor of Iowa had welcomed young Xi Jinping in 1985 and did so again when Xi returned as Vice President of China in 2012, had served as U.S. Chief of Mission in Beijing between 2017 and 2020. Based on that unique personal connection, Ambassador Branstad was a natural to open the Dialogue.

We

were especially delighted that the newly appointed U.S. Ambassador to China, Nicholas Burns, agreed to participate virtually from Beijing.

The

U.S.-China Agricultural Dialogue took place at the magnificent World Food Prize Hall of Laureates. That century-old edifice in the center of Des Moines is named in honor of Dr. Norman E. Borlaug, the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Iowa native, and Father of the

Green Revolution, who was among the very first American agricultural scientists to travel to China in the early 1970s.

Several

other attributes of the Hall of Laureates reflect China's unique agricultural linkage to the American Midwest:

-An

artwork that commemorates the 1980 visit to Iowa by Governor Xi Zhongxun, the father of President Xi Jinping and one of the chief architects of China's free market economic transformation and agricultural reforms.

-A

plaque honoring Professor Yuan Longping, the “Father of Hybrid Rice” for sharing the \$250,000 World Food Prize - - considered the “Nobel Prize in food and agriculture” - - in 2004;

-Most

significantly, the Hall of Laureates was the site for the 2012 U.S.-China High Level Agricultural Symposium, at which then-Vice President Xi Jinping gave the keynote address. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack and Chinese Minister Han Changfu signed a Memorandum of Strategic Cooperation in Agriculture, and contracts were completed for the export of \$3.5 billion of American soybeans to China.

To

be clear, while there were no dramatic breakthrough achievements at that Dialogue in Des Moines, there was the following extremely important takeaway lesson from the event: That during a time when a myriad of seemingly intractable political issues seemed to make government to government progress extremely difficult - - it was possible to have a positive discussion by senior officials from both sides take place in a separate channel organized by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as CASS and the USHCA.

With

those NGOs extending the invitations to senior leaders on both sides to attend the event, which would be held outside the capital city in an agricultural area, it became easier for senior diplomatic representatives to accept and participate.

This

“bifurcated type of diplomacy” - - organized by a non-governmental organization in the heartland - - can be an important step in rebuilding trust and restoring a more positive tone to the relationship.

## How

### **to Enhance Relations and Meet the Challenge of Feeding the World**

Further positive advances in the PRC-U.S. relationship can be achieved through a continuation of this “bifurcated diplomatic process”. There is reason to think that Beijing may share this view. On August 4, at a time of significantly heightened tensions, the People’s Daily newspaper ran a prominent story with the headline “President Xi Jinping has a deep understanding of farmers and rural life.” That story included extensive quotes from me about President Xi’s experiences in Iowa. It ended with a reference to President

Xi’s proposal for a “return to the spirit of cooperation, peaceful coexistence and working together to solve global challenges.” The message I took away was that agriculture could play a central role in this process.

## Following

through, the USHCA and the Chinese Agricultural Association for International Exchanges (CAAIE) plan for a 2023 US-China Agricultural Dialogue in the heartland - - in this case in St. Louis - - with a goal of further promoting peace through agriculture.

## The

### **“Road Out of Poverty and the Road to Peace”**

To that end, in my presentation entitled: “The Road Out of Poverty in Africa: An Iowa-Inspired Sino - American Collaboration” delivered at the *International Forum for Think-tanks and Media on “Global Development: Common Mission and the Imperative for Action”* hosted by the Chinese

Academy for Social Sciences, I noted that a comparison of 1980 Chinese highway maps with those of 2020 would demonstrate the clear linkage between the improvement and upgrading of rural roads and the reduction of poverty throughout the country.

When

I first arrived in Beijing in 1979, China was mired in poverty with 70% of the population or more at or below the poverty level. In addition, rural road penetration was less than 50%. Most significantly for this analysis, those statistics were replicated across

Africa.

In

analyzing China's extraordinary achievement over the next 50 years in elevating 750 million people out of poverty, one of the most important elements was the expansion of the upgraded rural farm-to-market road network to cover close to 100% of the country, along with the introduction of Professor Yuan Longping's revolutionary hybrid rice.

In

an article titled "Roads at heart of poverty alleviation in China", which appeared in the China Daily on October 16, 2022, and which quoted me, it states that "...places that lacked roads were rife with poverty, hunger and malnutrition. In China's case, impoverished areas began to recover once roads were built. Africa, however, in 2022 is still beset by levels of poverty and food insecurity closer to the 1979 statistics, and its improved rural road network still hovers at only around 50%.

As

I noted in my World Food Day address to the United Nations in New York in 2013, "where the road ends, poverty, hunger, malnutrition and conflict all begin."

**My**

**“Agricultural Dream” - Enhanced rural infrastructure is both "The Road Out of Poverty" and the “Road to Peace”**

**At**

a recent Chinese Academy of Social Sciences conference, I put forward a proposal focused on agricultural development on the African continent. Entitled “The Road Out of Poverty: An Iowa-Inspired Chinese-American-African Collaboration”, this initiative would call specifically for a collaboration aimed at uplifting agricultural production in Africa through joint research on increasing crop yields and dramatically upgrading rural road infrastructure.

**In**

my remarks at the conclusion of the USHCA - CASS organized Agricultural Dialogue in St. Louis, I spoke of “My Agricultural Dream.” In it I envisioned senior leaders of both China and the U.S. could return to Iowa and the World Food Prize Hall of Laureates, which is so rich with tradition. And there, with the inspiration of Yuan Longping and Norman Borlaug around them, jointly announce that the two countries were launching a partnership with key African institutions, such as the African Development Bank, to promote

the upgrading of rural roads and infrastructure across the African continent. In this way, by working together to address the greatest challenge in history, China and the United States would also be promoting peace between our countries and peace for the planet.

**The**

2023 World Food Prize events in Des Moines in October of 2023, the APEC Summit one month later in San Francisco and the 2024 U.S.-China Agricultural Dialogue being planned by the USHCA and Chinese organizations like CASS, all offer an opportunity for the two countries to reverse the current array of polarizing negative issues. By recapturing that spirit of 2012 when President Xi Jinping last visited Iowa, the the United States and China could commit to an unprecedented partnership to ensure that our planet successfully

overcomes the greatest challenge in human history.

END TEXT