

Chapter 1: The Deep Roots of the Xi Jinping-Iowa Relationship

by Ambassador Kenneth M. Quinn

Kenneth M. Quinn, Ambassador Extraordinaire with Creative Ingenuity

Dr. Kenneth M. Quinn, former U.S. Ambassador to Cambodia now serves as President and CEO of the World Food Prize Foundation following a 32 year career in the United States Foreign Service. Ambassador Quinn rose to become one of the most decorated Foreign Service Officers of his generation; he was recognized for the important role he played in humanitarian endeavors as well as his actions in high risk situations. He is an emblem of Iowa internationalism, a valuable asset to the globalized community and a legacy to Iowa's continuing international character. Ambassador Quinn received the Iowa Award, an honor that stands as Iowa's highest citizen award in recognition of outstanding service. The side of Ambassador Quinn's recognition medal that rests against his chest reads: "Diplomat, Warrior, Passionate Humanitarian. He has been present since the beginning of the Xi Jinping-Iowa story.

- Sarah D. Lande

It was an impressive American delegation that awaited Vice President Xi in Des Moines as he stepped from his car that morning in 2012, accompanied by U.S. Ambassador to China Gary Locke, Governor Branstad and Secretary Vilsack. It was my honor to lead Vice President Xi into the Hall of Laureates that day, and as we walked I shared with him the story of when I met his father in Iowa in 1980. I added that I am now likely one of the very few persons in Iowa who has had the honor of shaking the hands of both Mr. Xi and his father. Then-Vice President Xi, who must meet dozens of unfamiliar persons like me every day, was visibly touched. He stopped, turned, and looked directly at me with a smile on his face said, "Now you have two interesting stories to tell," he said.

The events that followed during Valentines Day Weekend, 2012 became known in Iowa as President Xi's "homecoming." Mr. Xi's visit included a sentimental return to Muscatine and to the home of Sarah Lande, and a formal dinner that evening at the Iowa State Capitol. It was a great privilege for the World Food Prize Foundation to help plan for that event and to host a U.S.-China Agricultural Symposium at the Norman E. Borlaug Hall of Laureates in Des Moines.

This story is one that demonstrates the leading role that agriculture can play in initiating bonds between peoples, cultures, and countries. The story displays the power of citizen diplomacy and acts of personal kindness, which resonate across cultures and grow over time. In a personal sense, this story also chronicles my own odyssey and connection to China, which began with my first trip in 1979, accompanying Iowa governor Robert D. Ray at the very beginning of normalizing communications.

The rich relations that we enjoy today between the people of Iowa and those of Hebei province began first in 1980 when Xi Zhongxun, Xi Jinping's father, came to Iowa as the leader of a delegation of Chinese governors. This visit continued a tradition of exchanges between highly prominent Chinese and Iowan citizens throughout the 19th century, and inspired the subsequent journeys taken by Xi Zhongxun's son, the future president of China, in 1985 and 2012.

The historic series of visits and exchanges between Iowa and China date back more than 100 years. One early remarkable Iowan was President Herbert Hoover. In the late 1890s, a young Herbert Hoover, with his new wife Lou, boarded a ship for China where he was to serve as a mining consultant in Tianjin. Even though they spent just

over a year in china, experiencing a turbulent political environment, they two came in close contact with the Chinese culture, which impacted Hoover's relationship to East Asia for the rest of his life.

Perhaps the most celebrated visit to China by an Iowan was made by Vice President Henry A. Wallace in 1944 when, at the direction of President Franklin Roosevelt, he undertook a mission to the Far East to reassure and coordinate with key allies during World War II. Roosevelt visited several cities in China, delivering messages of solidarity in the war effort.

Agriculture had also been at the center of observations 20 years earlier by Elizabeth Hoyt, a professor at Iowa State University. When on an around the world trip in the 1920's, she included a stop in China where she saw firsthand the impact on urban populations after a poor harvest struck. She brought back similar observations about the potential of Chinese agriculture and food production.

The World Food Prize was founded by Iowa's and America's greatest agricultural scientist, and a man with a special connection to China himself, the late Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Dr. Norman E. Borlaug. Borlaug created the World Food Prize, an annual \$250,000 award, known informally as the Nobel Prize for Food and Agriculture, to honor individuals who have made exceptional breakthrough achievements in increasing the quality, quantity and availability of food in the world. Two individuals from the People's Republic of China have been recipients of the Prize since its creation in 1986: former Minister of Agriculture He Kang (1993) and Professor Yuan Longping, the "father of hybrid rice" (2004).

It was during his visit to China in 1978 that Dr. Borlaug recommended that Premier Zhou Enlai and Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping focus their attentions on the

construction of new fertilizer plants as a first step toward greatly increasing China's agricultural output. With the policy input of Governor Xi Zhongxun, paramount leader Deng Xiaoping decided to follow his advice.

In 2004, 30 years after his first visit to China, Dr. Borlaug pointed to the decision to greatly expand the construction of fertilizer plants as being at the heart of the extraordinary agricultural progress that had been made in China over the past several decades. No other country could match that extraordinary achievement in such a short period of time.

In 1978, U.S. President Jimmy Carter made the decision to shift American policy and to recognize the government in Beijing as the legitimate ruler of China. Following paramount leader Deng Xiaoping's historic visit to the United States in early 1979, a series of bilateral exchanges commenced, including the first post-normalization visit by a delegation of U.S. governors to China in October of that year.

One of the American governors on that trip was Robert D. Ray of Iowa. At the time, I was on assignment from the U.S. State Department to Governor Ray's office and as such joined the trip. It would be my first-ever travel to China. Soon, Iowa was host to a visiting delegation of Chinese governors, including Xi Zhongxun, Xi Jinping's father in 1980. This was part of the formal set of exchanges that were an important element of the new, normalized China-U.S. diplomatic relations.

The leader of that delegation, whom Governor Ray and I met at the Des Moines airport, was Xi Zhongxun, listed as both the Governor of Guangdong Province and, even more significantly, Vice Chairman of the National People's Congress. As I shook hands with Governor Xi that Sunday morning, I had no way of knowing that it would be a

moment that would have such resonance almost four decades later when I would greet his son in Des Moines at the Hall of Laureates.

Friendships and improved relationships do not happen overnight. The official announcements that preceded the 1980 Chinese governors' visit to Iowa reflected the fact that this now official relationship was still in an exploratory phase. An October 13 press release from the Office of the Governor in Des Moines Governor Ray is quoted as saying, "Iowa will have a unique opportunity to strengthen its ties with the Peoples Republic of China when this first gubernatorial-level Chinese delegation to visit the U.S. stops in our state." His statement signaled the potential and yet the uncertainty of the outcome of the visit.

At that time, Iowa was very interested in presenting itself as a significant manufacturing entity in order to provide balance to the impression that many outsiders had of the state being only an agricultural producer. Indeed, Cedar Rapids, the second-largest city in the state, heralded itself as the "per capita leading exporting community in America." For that reason, Governor Ray turned to the Iowa Development Commission, the state's economic promotion agency, to coordinate the schedule for the Chinese governors' visit.

We worked directly with Ms. Jan Barris of the National Committee on United States-China Relations, whom we met in 1979, and the staff of the Iowa Development Commission to provide an interesting and balanced visit. Governor Ray and I got to know Ms. Barris, who still continues in her leadership position at the National Committee today. She is one of the most significant figures in the five-decade long

endeavor to build positive relationships between China and the United States, and was very instrumental in including Iowa on the 1980 Chinese governors delegation itinerary.

The three-day October 26-29, 1980, visit to Iowa by the Chinese governors, while short in duration, was packed with a non-stop whirlwind of activities and stops.

Immediately following their Sunday morning arrival at the airport, the delegation was whisked off for an 11 a.m. visit to the Des Moines Botanical Center, which featured nearly one thousand species of tropical and subtropical plants housed under a 60-foot tall geodesic dome. The main feature, however, may have been the Iowa Chop barbeque lunch, which was the delegation's introduction to delicious Iowa pork.

From there, the delegation traveled to Living History Farms, which is a museum portraying Iowa farm life at various times over the past 150 years. The delegation saw how Iowa's first settlers turned the Iowa sod into farmland in the 1830's and 40's, abetted by the John Deere steel plow. That evening, Governor Ray hosted a reception for the delegation at Terrace Hill, the 1869 restored Victorian Mansion which serves as the Iowa Governor's official residence. Dinner for the delegation was hosted by Iowa families in private homes that evening.

Monday morning, October 27, started with a breakfast and tour at the Pioneer Hi-Bred International research facility at Johnston on the outskirts of Des Moines. This is the company that young Henry A. Wallace founded and through which he would distribute his new hybrid corn. Wallace later became U.S. Secretary of Agriculture and the Vice President. The power of research and commercial distribution of new agricultural products and technology was front and center.

This initial meeting led to remarkable business opportunities. In 2015, the company operates under its new name DuPont Pioneer, and has a significant business

presence in China, including seed distribution sites in multiple locations, research collaboration and a planned new research hub. The governors visited the John Deere manufacturing plant in Ankeny, where the delegation gained insight into how far modern agricultural machinery had evolved since John Deere's first steel plow. It was the beginning of a business connection that would lead to a significant John Deere manufacturing and sales presence in China.

Iowa State University, one of the top agricultural research institutions in the world, was toured. The Chinese governors saw the powerful role that the land-grant educational research institutions played in promoting and enhancing Iowa agriculture. This introduction would eventually lead to a flood of Chinese undergraduate and graduate students studying at both Iowa State University and the University of Iowa. By 2012, when Vice President Xi Jinping visited, the combined number of Chinese students was over 3,000 a year.

The first full day of the Chinese governors visit to Iowa had been a rapid fire review of the factors that had combined to make the state so productive. That evening, the Chinese delegation had a formal banquet with Governor Ray. Governor Ray delivered a poignant toast that showed the already warming relationship after just two days.

It is these personal relationships which are formed during visits like this one that are so important to furthering mutual understanding and friendship between our two peoples. Now that we have normal relations between the People's Republic of China and the United States, it is

important that we solidify this relationship by establishing links and building bridges – not just between our central governments in the capital cities – but between our states and provinces, between our cities and towns, between our universities and colleges and between our people.

That is why this is such an important visit – because it brings together people from both societies that are engaged in carrying out the essential task of both countries – growing food; producing manufactured goods; educating the young and developing our communities so that they are better places in which people may live...

To that end, we in Iowa are hopeful that after you leave for home, that we can build upon your important visit in developing stronger, mutually beneficial relationships between our state and your provinces in the fields of commerce, agriculture, education, and technological exchange and culture.

In Cedar Rapids the next day, the delegation visited three separate manufacturing plants: ADM Corn Sweeteners; Iowa Manufacturing, which made gravel-crushing machines for the road industry; and Rockwell International, which employed more than 115,000 people worldwide in manufacturing electronics and avionics for

aircraft and the aerospace industry. By 2015, Rockwell Collins was a partner in a successful joint venture with China Eastern Airlines.

This 1980 introduction was a first step in building a business connection for ADM with China, which led to ADM beginning operations in China in the mid-1990's, and eventually becoming one of the largest exporters of U.S. grain and commodities to China. This relationship came full circle in 2014 when ADM announced it was building the first wholly owned foreign agricultural processing facility in China---a corn sweeteners plant also in the Chinese port city of Tianjin, the same place Herbert Hoover was stationed 100 years earlier. Later, at the Butler and Wade hog farm operation, we learned about marketing 5,000 head of hogs annually.

Late that afternoon, the delegation stopped to have dinner at the Amana Colonies, one of Iowa's longstanding tourist attractions. This turned out to be one of the most fascinating parts of the entire Iowa visit because the governors understood Amana as an early American form of communal living that functioned similarly to communist tenants. I vividly recall sitting across the table from Governor Xi and the other senior members of the delegation as our host explained that Amana had been founded in 1854 as the home for about 800 immigrants who came to the U.S. from Germany to avoid religious persecution. After their arrival in Iowa, the group adopted a communal philosophy—from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs. Together, they farmed 35,000 acres using old world skills handed down through generations. In 1932, the citizens of Amana dropped the communal, collective decision-making system by a vote of the people, and formed a stock corporation cooperative, in effect, giving each family control of their own plots of land. Mr. Xi was enthralled and he

and the other delegates were more animated and asked more questions in than at any other stop.

In Amana, the delegation visited a museum depicting the communal lifestyle and then toured the woolen mills, furniture factory and the Amana refrigeration company, all of which produced high-quality products, including refrigerator and freezers. At the time, I thought the Chinese visitors were so interested in this topic because it seemed a historical oddity—communism in a capitalist America. Looking back now, I cannot help but wonder if Governor Xi may have seen Amana as a microcosm for the changes he was contemplating in China. Amana had gone from a pure “commune-ism,” to a market based system facilitating ownership of the productive elements of the community using a profit-based system that brought greater prosperity to all. At the same time, Amana had managed to retain its sense of culture of its people, the cohesiveness of its community, and the high-quality of its manufactured products.

One of the most significant discussions that took place with the Chinese delegation happened shortly afterwards, when Iowa expressed the desire to establish a sister state relationship. Iowa’s initial interest had been in a possible connection with Sichuan or Liaoning provinces, both of which were represented by their governors on this delegation.

It is important to note that, had either of those provincial connections been approved, it would have almost certainly meant that the 1985 visit to Iowa five years later by a young provincial official from Hebei province named Xi Jinping would not have taken place.

Fortunately, for history’s sake, both Sichuan and Liaoning provinces were already in discussions with other American states and thus would not be available for a

partnership with Iowa. It was, additionally, fortuitous that Mr. Hong Yi, the Deputy Governor of Hebei Province, was a part of the delegation of governors who arrived in Iowa in 1980. It was his presence that would be the first step in identifying Hebei and Iowa as being a good fit.

As a result of this interaction, ten months later, on August 17, 1981, Governor Ray received a letter from Mr. Hou Tong, the Vice President of the Chinese People's Association, for Friendship with Foreign Countries, formally proposing that Hebei become Iowa's sister state.

In his letter, Mr. Hou noted that Hebei had a population of 51 million people and was a major corn and wheat producer in China, like Iowa in the United States. While Iowa was outnumbered by almost 49 million people and the state did not produce any wheat, it seemed like the partnership nonetheless would work well for both sides. As a result, on January 25, 1982, Governor Ray signed a letter to Mr. Hou Tong accepting the proposal for Hebei and Iowa to be sister states.

While a formal agreement to be signed by both Iowa and Hebei was drafted in Governor Ray's office, the actual agreement would be formalized in 1983 by Iowa's newly elected governor, Terry E. Branstad, who would play such a central role in developing the state's connection to Xi Jinping.

The story of how Xi Jinping came to Iowa is as fascinating as that of his father. At the same time that Iowa and Hebei were formalizing their sister-state relationship, 30-year old Xi Jinping was serving as the Party Secretary in Zhengding County of Hebei Province. In that position, between 1982 and 1985, he gave high-priority to the issue of enhanced agricultural production.

Clearly reflecting his father's new policies, a young Xi Jinping is credited with significant reforms in terms of the administrative processing of agriculture support programs which brought more income to farmers. It was this emphasis on agriculture that most likely resulted in his being chosen to be part of the 1985 visit to Iowa by a Hebei delegation with a focus on corn processing.

At the conclusion of the Chinese governors' delegation's 1980 visit to Iowa, Governor Ray presented a photo album to Governor Xi with pictures from their visit. It was accompanied by a very warm letter in which Governor Ray told Governor Xi:

“From my three trips to the People's Republic of China, I know how important visits like yours can be to increasing mutual understanding and friendship between our two countries...Now that we have had this chance to get to know each other better, it is our fond hope that we may build upon our friendship, and that through your visit we may achieve an even closer relationship between the People's Republic and the State of Iowa.”

Upon arriving at the Brown Hotel in Denver on October 30, Governor Xi sent a very warm mailgram to Governor Ray in which he stated:

“As we conclude our visit to the beautiful state of Iowa, I wish to take this opportunity on behalf of all my colleagues on the Chinese governors delegation and myself to thank you and your colleagues for the wonderful hospitality accorded us during our stay here. As we bid farewell to you we take back with us happy memories of our visit as well as your

friendship for the Chinese people. I thank you again and look forward to the opportunity of seeing you either in Beijing or Iowa.

Sincerely,

Xi Zhongxun

Leader, Chinese Governor Delegation.”

Governor Ray’s toast about a long friendship at the banquet for Governor Xi and the 18 members of his delegation on that October evening in 1980 had certainly been borne out and carried forward by Governor Branstad's leadership and the special relationship he developed with President Xi. It is also a remarkable story of the power of citizen diplomacy as exemplified by individuals like Sarah Lande and Luca Berrone to build friendship and promote extraordinary trade and agricultural exchanges.

It was my personal privilege to have been a part of Governor Ray’s staff throughout this entire opening act of the Iowa- China connection. While I departed in September 1982 to return to the U.S. State Department, I was very pleased that we had put in place the formal agreement which newly elected Iowa Governor Terry E. Branstad would sign on July 22, 1983, by which Hebei and Iowa were established as sister states and which would lead to the next chapter in the Iowa-China odyssey.

On his return visit in 2012, Vice President Xi delivered the opening keynote address at the day-long symposium, which included the signing of a U.S.-China Strategic Cooperation Agreement by U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack and Chinese Minister of Agriculture Han Changfu. It was an extraordinary aggregation of senior Chinese and U.S. officials who came to the World Food Prize Hall that day,

including the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs Yang Jiechi and Zhang Yesui, China's ambassador to the United States.

As I escorted Vice President Xi Jinping into the hall in 2012, I was able to show him the 20-foot tall sculpture of a soybean plant that adorns our rotunda. At the bottom is a medallion with the name of the crop written in Chinese characters, denoting that it was first cultivated in that country. This drew a wide smile from him. Soybeans are now a huge part of the Iowa-China agricultural trade. For instance, earlier contracts were signed by Chinese and U.S. agribusiness executives for the sale of \$4.3 billion of U.S. soybeans to China.

The inspiration of the early agricultural exchanges between China and the United States later led Dr. Norman Borlaug and John Ruan, Sr. to expand our World Food Prize youth education program. Now, each year, we send four high school age students from Iowa to China for eight-week internships at China Agricultural University, the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Science, Peking University and the China National Hybrid Rice Research Center in Changsha.

In return, we welcomed five high school age students and a teacher from Shijiazhuang Foreign Language School in Hebei to attend our Global Youth Institute in Des Moines. They are most fascinated when I show them where President Xi Jinping stood to deliver his 2012 keynote address, and the students want their own photos taken at that same podium.

These Iowa and Chinese students, who were not born when either Xi Zhongxun or Xi Jinping first visited Iowa, are in some ways the most important outcome of those exchanges. They represent that "next generation" whom Dr. Borlaug and his Chinese

counterparts wanted to inspire to education and careers in agricultural science as our planet confronts the "greatest challenge in human history: whether we can sustainably feed the 9 plus billion people who will be living in 2050." The message of the visits and exchanges over the past decades is that we will only meet this challenge if we work together. The Iowa-China connection is central to this endeavor.

