

TWO FAMILIES AND THE 75 YEAR LONG THREAD OF SINO-AMERICAN RELATIONS

an address by

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In June 2017, in my capacity as President of the World Food Prize Foundation in Des Moines, Iowa, I was most pleased to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with Dr. Wang Lei of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) linking our two organizations in “think-tank” endeavors such as the symposium on the 19th Party Plenum In November of last year and now this conference on the Opportunities and Challenges associated with the 40th anniversary of the establishment of Sino-U.S. diplomatic relations.

While not a “China hand,” during my 32 year career at the U.S. State Department, I did have an array of interesting experiences connection to many of the events surrounding the formal normalization of relations, which I hope might give my presentation a somewhat unique perspective. Included were: serving as Special Assistant to Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke in 1978, in the run up to the U.S. decision to normalize; meeting Paramount Leader Deng Xiaoping in China in 1979 while accompanying the first delegation of US governors to visit China following normalization; and personally escorting Governor Xi Zhongxun around Iowa in 1980 when he led the first group of Chinese provincial governors on a reciprocal visit to America one year later.

In my current role as president of the World Food Prize Foundation, I served as host for the U.S.-China High Level Agricultural Symposium which took place in Des Moines, Iowa in February 2012 and at which then Vice President Xi Jinping delivered the keynote address and a Strategic Cooperation in Agriculture memorandum was signed.

That these latter two events took place not in Washington or Beijing but rather in Iowa, a small remote agricultural state in the middle of America, may be instructive as we consider how to meet the Challenges and Opportunities presented by the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between our two countries.

In that same regard, it is noteworthy that the December 11 CASS Think Tank Symposium in Beijing follows so closely after two other occurrences in America: the December 5 funeral of President George

Herbert Walker Bush and the December 7 observance of Pearl Harbor Day, recalling the start of America's involvement in World War II.

As the bold headline in the December 5 edition of the China Daily newspaper in the U.S. proclaimed "Bush drew US, China closer." Like the Xi family, George Herbert Walker Bush had a unique connection to Iowa, that similarly began in 1980.

Given the challenges our two countries face in dealing with the short term issues affecting trade relations and especially agricultural trade, it may be that the long term history of the connections between our two peoples may provide the inspiration to help resolve these issues.

Iowa provides a remarkable opportunity to do this.

In commemorating the 40th anniversary of the establishment of US -Chinese diplomatic relations, to understand the fundamental foundation of the relationship of our two countries, it may be more insightful to look back not at what occurred in 1979, but rather in the summer of 1944.

At that time, the Chinese people and the American people were allied in arguably the most significant existential struggle that either country has faced during the last 75 years- World War II. That year, two seemingly unrelated events took place in the Pacific, which in retrospect contain the threads of the unique political relationship that has evolved over several generations, and which may offer an opportunity to look beyond current trade issues and celebrate a deeper historic legacy.

On July 22, 1944 a US military aircraft carrying a senior American Army officer and several State Department specialists landed in remote Yan'an Province of China. Known as the Dixie Mission, their assignment was to establish a connection with Chairman Mao Zedong and the People's Liberation Forces which were sheltered in bunkers to avoid Japanese bombing missions. The aim of the Dixie Mission was to further collaboration between China and the US in prosecuting the war.

It was the first ever official contact between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party. One of the key intermediaries between the two parties was a young Chinese revolutionary official who was serving as political commissar in Yan'an.

Forty-two days later on September 2, hundreds of miles away over the Pacific, a US Navy plane was shot down by Japanese anti-aircraft weapons. The young pilot who successfully bailed out was rescued by a near by Naval craft.

That young Navy pilot was 19 year old George Herbert Walker Bush, whose life and exploits in the War were celebrated in early December around his state funeral. The young Chinese Political Commissar was Xi Zhongxun, the father of President Xi Jinping.

Interestingly, following the normalization of diplomatic relations, their lives would intersect in a meaningful way in 1980 in the American state of Iowa.

Bush, who had successfully enhanced bilateral relations as the head of the U.S. Liaison Office in Beijing, was in Iowa among a field of exceptional Republican Party presidential candidates. Given that Washington and Beijing had just established diplomatic relations, Bush's experience in China added

significantly to his qualifications. On January 21, 1980 he pulled off a stunning upset of Ronald Reagan, defeating the front runner by 1,000 votes in the Iowa Presidential Caucuses.

It was a slim victory, but one that would propel him to the Vice Presidency and eventually the Oval Office, just as the Iowa Caucuses had earlier launched the White House bid of Jimmy Carter, the president who would make the historic decision to establish formal relations.

It is significant to note that just as in 1944, it had been an issue of national security - - this time the threat of the Soviet Union perceived in both capitals- - that had brought both U.S. officials in Washington and the leaders of the Communist Party of China together in 1979 to take this historic step.

Washington and Moscow were involved in a nuclear stand off in the midst of the Cold War. The massive array of weapons on both sides had the potential of mutual destruction. At the same time, China and the Soviet Union had developed an increasingly destabilizing rivalry. The Soviet presence in Southeast and South Asia posed a potential military threat to China. The new diplomatic relationship provided mutual assurances and support in both capitals toward their common adversary.

In October 1979, I had the opportunity to visit China for the first time while accompanying the Governor of Iowa and five other American governors. Included was the enormous privilege of meeting Paramount Leader Deng Xiaoping and discussing with him attitudes toward the genocidal Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. Once again, a comity of views was evident as Deng openly criticized the Khmer Rouge of making critical "mistakes."

During my stay in China, I had the chance to visit Guangdong Province where I observed the very first indications of the new economic policies that the Governor was implementing and which would eventually be spread across the entire country bringing about the dramatic transformation, uplifting about 500 million people out of poverty.

Upon returning to Iowa, I had a front row seat as George Bush, extolling his foreign policy experience, including in China, won a stunning upset victory in the Iowa Caucuses in January, 1980. Ten months after Bush's electoral victory, on October 28, 1980 Xi Zhongxun stepped from a plane in Des Moines, leading the first group of Chinese provincial governors to visit the United States following the establishment of diplomatic relations.

On assignment from the State Department to the staff of Iowa Governor Robert D. Ray, I had the opportunity to escort Governor Xi's delegation around the state, with a significant emphasis on agricultural development. The very first place the Chinese delegation visited was the Des Moines Botanical Garden, where the Iowa Pork Producers hosted a bar-b-que Luncheon in their honor.

Over the next two days, Governor Xi and his group traveled to Iowa State University agricultural research facilities, a John Deere manufacturing plant and a DuPont Pioneer agri-business headquarters. It is important to note that at that time there was zero agricultural trade (including in soybeans) between the U.S. and China, zero U.S. investment in China, zero importation of Chinese products into America and no Chinese students studying at U.S. institutions of higher learning.

The last stop on our tour of Iowa was at the Amana Colonies which had been founded in the 19th century by a European religious group as a totally communist system. In its original form, it mirrored the

organization of Chinese agriculture in 1980, with all land and production owned and controlled by the commune.

I still recall how Governor Xi became extremely interested when it was explained that in the 1930s Amana went through a dramatic transformation. While retaining its political and social culture, the Amana colony divided its land into individual family farms, allowing farmers to keep and sell all of their crops.

As Governor of Guangdong, the founder of the Shenzhen Special Zone and a key advisor to Deng Xiaoping, in retrospect, Governor Xi's visit to Iowa seemed to help reinforce and possibly shape his ideas that would lead to the dramatic transformation of Chinese agricultural policy.

Governor Xi's 1980 visit led to an extended set of exchanges and proposals that I coordinated in the Governor's office, and which resulted in Iowa establishing a sister-state relationship with Hebei Province. Five years later, as part of China's new focus on agricultural modernization, a 31 year old party secretary from Hebei Province arrived in Iowa as part of "a corn processing delegation.". His name was Xi Jinping, and that initial foray to the American heartland and particularly the town of Muscatine, would create a unique personal connection to Iowa.

Over the next three decades, as the Chinese - American bilateral economic relationship would flourish, the sons of those two political leaders would rise to prominence and political leadership. George W. Bush would become governor of Texas and then the 43rd U.S. president. In China, as the policies his father advocated transformed the country, Xi Jinping would rise within the Chinese Communist Party eventually to the position of President.

On the cusp of assuming that highest office, Vice President Xi Jinping made a sentimental return to Iowa in February, 2012, where then Governor (now Ambassador to China) Terry Branstad hosted a state dinner in his honor. Indeed, at the "state dinner," Vice President Xi had quoted the American author Mark Twain when making very sentimental comments about his memories of the sunset over the Mississippi River while staying in Muscatine.

The following day, those two family legacies symbolically came together, when Vice President Xi delivered the keynote address at the U.S.-China High Level Symposium on Agricultural Cooperation. That event took place at the World Food Prize Hall of Laureates in Des Moines, in which hangs a portrait of George H.W. Bush who served for two decades on my organization's Advisory Council.

As the host for the symposium, it was an enormous privilege for me to personally welcome then Vice President Xi and to escort him into to our Hall of Laureates to deliver his address at that conference.

As we walked together, through the interpreter I remarked to Vice President Xi that his was a most interesting story, having first come to Iowa in 1985 as a young party official from Hebei Province and now returning to the state in his most senior position. To commemorate his legacy in Iowa, I told the Vice President that I was commissioning a painting to hang in our building. Vice President Xi expressed his appreciation for this gesture.

I then added another story. I said, "Mr. Vice President, I just shook your hand, and I am one of the very few Iowans to also shake your Father's hand when he visited Iowa in 1980," as the leader of the first group of Chinese provincial governors to visit the United States following the establishment of Sino-

American diplomatic relations. I further explained that I had escorted Governor Xi and his delegation around Iowa.

Surprised, but clearly pleased by this unexpected reference to his Father's leadership role three decades earlier, Vice President Xi remarked that I now had "Two Interesting Stories" to tell in my painting.

Today that painting, with President Xi's quote inscribed across the bottom in Chinese, hangs in our World Food Prize Hall of Laureates in Des Moines. There is also a copy in Ambassador Terry Branstad's office at the American Embassy in Beijing.

During that 2012 Symposium at which President Xi spoke, a formal Strategic Cooperation in Agriculture agreement was finalized by U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack and Chinese Agriculture Minister Han Changfu. In addition, contracts were signed for \$3.5 billion in US soybean exports to China.

It was truly remarkable to consider how dramatically the U.S.-Chinese trade and agricultural sales had increased between those two Xi family visits. Indeed, in many ways, Xi Jinping's return visit to Iowa in 2012 could be seen as representing the high point in Sino-American relations.

In May of 2018, Chinese Ambassador to Washington Cui Tiankai traveled to Des Moines to celebrate the launch of a new book entitled "Old Friends- -The Xi Jinping-Iowa Story," authored by Sarah Lande, one of the persons who had hosted young Xi Jinping in the Iowa town of Muscatine during his visit in 1985.

The celebration began with a welcome luncheon at the Des Moines Botanical Garden, the same venue as where Governor Xi Zhongxun had his welcome luncheon in 1980. After the lunch, the attendees drove past the spectacular Chinese pavilion that is the centerpiece of the Robert D. Ray Garden commemorating that Iowa Governor's leadership in building connections to Asia, including his welcoming Governor Xi.

Designed by Iowa architect Paul Shao, the Pavilion had been fabricated in China and then assembled under Chinese direction along the Des Moines River. Two previous Chinese ambassadors to the U.S. - - Yang Jiechi and Zhou Wenzhong - - had traveled to Iowa for the ground breaking and to dedicate the project. The structure and the beautiful garden surrounding it gleamed in the brilliant sunshine on that day.

The book launch ceremony was held in the same grand ballroom of the World Food Prize Hall of Laureates in which Vice President Xi gave his address in 2012. The uplifting tone of the remarks recalled that high point in Chinese-U.S. relations, now roiled by the imposition of tariffs and with the sale of American agricultural commodities like soybeans significantly diminished.

As the ceremony concluded, the volatile Iowa weather suddenly changed: the sky darkened and sirens sounded across the city warning of an approaching tornado. Extremely strong winds buffeted the nearby buildings and trees. Chinese and American guests rushed to take shelter together on the lower level of the building.

When the warning had ended, guests came back to the main floor and peered out the window. The dark clouds had passed and in the distance, it was possible to see the striking Chinese designed pavilion at the Botanical Garden, the first site Governor Xi Zhongxun visited in 1980, was unaffected and not damaged.

In a sense that day is the metaphor for the current state of Chinese-American relations. The dark cloud of the harsh dispute over trade threatens to severely damage that relationship that has been nurtured over the past 75 years beginning with the landing of that C-47 aircraft in Yan'an in July 1944 and the historic connection of the Xi and Bush families to Iowa.

As we commemorate the 40th anniversary of the establishment of Sino-American diplomatic relations, it may be that the places that offer the best opportunity to inspire the political steps needed to return to that high point of relations may be not in Washington or Beijing, but in the Revolutionary Museum in Yan'an or the Chinese Pavilion and World Food Prize Hall of Laureates in Iowa.

As Iowa celebrates its 172nd anniversary of statehood on December 28, its connection to the Xi family and the Bush family may be one of its most significant aspects of its long history and an enormous opportunity to help meet the significant challenges facing our countries in 2019 and beyond.