

CONNECTIONS

An Annual Journal of the Kettering Foundation | 2016

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Engagement**

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Kettering's Multinational Research



The Kettering Foundation is a nonprofit, operating foundation rooted in the American tradition of cooperative research. Kettering's primary research question is, what makes democracy work as it should? Kettering's research is distinctive because it is conducted from the perspective of citizens and focuses on what people can do collectively to address problems affecting their lives, their communities, and their nation. The foundation seeks to identify and address the challenges to making democracy work as it should through inter-related program areas that focus on citizens, communities, and institutions. The foundation collaborates with an extensive network of community groups, professional associations, researchers, scholars, and citizens around the world. Established in 1927 by inventor Charles F. Kettering, the foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization that does not make grants but engages in joint research with others. For more information about KF research and publications, see the Kettering Foundation's website at www.kettering.org.

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The Kettering Foundation and China-US Relations

By Wang Jisi

Since 1986, the Kettering Foundation has maintained a close and fruitful relationship with China, especially with China's scholarly community. As a participant in this relationship from the beginning, I am both humbled

at Kettering's brave and strenuous efforts to strengthen US-China ties and proud of being a small part of them.

In 1986, when I was a junior lecturer in Peking University's Department of International Politics, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) cosponsored with the Kettering Foundation a group visit to the United States. The Chinese delegation was headed by Li Shen zhi, vice president of CASS, and consisted of several senior Chinese individuals and four "young observers," including Yuan Ming of Peking University and myself. We toured Racine, Wisconsin, where we joined the US delegation headed by Kettering president David Mathews and attended a conference together,





which covered world politics in general and China-US relations in particular. We were also entertained by local officials and celebrities in Racine. In fact, what impressed me most was not anything related to China-US relations, but a special session conducted by David Mathews, in which he vividly introduced

Kettering's political philosophy and approach to conducting its projects.

It was the first time I had ever heard a representative of an American NGO explain to us how it worked. During the Racine conference, we had interesting conversations with our US counterparts, some of whom had no China connection at all. Racine was a perfect location that allowed Chinese and American public citizens to get to know each other personally.

I confess, although I had spent 18 months at the University of California at Berkeley in 1984-1985 and toured other American cities and towns during that period, my personal contacts in the United States had been confined almost exclusively to Americans who were interested in China, East Asia, or international politics. It was Kettering that widened my horizon by bringing me to Racine and, later, to Dayton, Ohio, where its

“ With my experience at Kettering, I have developed a strong belief that we will not be able to catch the essence of US foreign policy and US-China relations unless we understand how civil society functions in America.

headquarters is located. This helped me become familiar with grassroots America. In this sense, Kettering opened a window for me—and presumably for many other Chinese colleagues who have participated in the Kettering programs—to observe and understand American society and domestic politics by way of knowing some “real” Americans who live in “typical” US cities like Dayton.

As one of the so-called “US watchers” in China, I used to make the analogy that the relationship between China and the United States is like a state-society relationship. In the China-US relationship, China acts as a state, a hierarchical structure of organizations like CASS and Peking University with individuals in them as a subordinating part, whereas America acts as a society, in which horizontal networks like the Kettering Foundation coexist with governmental organizations but are not subordinated to them. With my experience at Kettering, I have developed a strong belief that we will not be able to catch the essence of US foreign policy and US-China relations unless we understand how civil society functions in America. It will take more time for me, or other Chinese, to fully grasp the meaning of such concepts as “framing public deliberation.” Still, Kettering’s numerous programs have greatly



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benefited dozens of Chinese citizens and enriched our knowledge about the United States beyond government-to-government connections.

Indeed, it is my own observation that the greatest contribution Kettering has made to the China-US relationship is to bring together social elites from the two societies, making friends between us, letting us know that we share the same purposes of life—happiness, love, family, harmony, and unity. To be sure, political and cultural differences, as well as geographical spans, divide the two peoples, but these differences are secondary if compared to our shared purposes of life as human beings.



In the past 30 years, Kettering's engagement with China's embassy has weathered a variety of troubles and incidents in the official relationship between the two countries, including the threat (and soon after) the collapse of the Soviet Union, the 1989 Beijing political storm, the Taiwan Strait tensions, the NATO bombing of China's embassy in Belgrade, the collision between Chinese and American airplanes over the South China Sea, US arms sales to Taiwan, and most recently, the disputes concerning the South China Sea. Under none of these circumstances did our friends at Kettering hesitate about continuing dialogue with their counterparts in

China, no matter what their political backgrounds were. Kettering has kept sending delegations to China and receiving Chinese guests in America regardless of any moment



of a souring political atmosphere. During dialogues between Kettering and its Chinese counterparts, there was no effort to impose one side's position on the other side, and mutual respect was always shown. It is hard to measure the extent to which Kettering's China connection influenced the bilateral relationship between the two bodies politic, but we are sure that the influence is absolutely positive and greatly appreciated by those whose interests lie in stabilizing and strengthening China-US ties.

We should, of course, pay a heartfelt tribute to David Mathews, former congressman James Leach, Zheng Bijian, Zi Zhongyun, Maxine Thomas, and others in the Kettering community whose leading roles are indispensable.

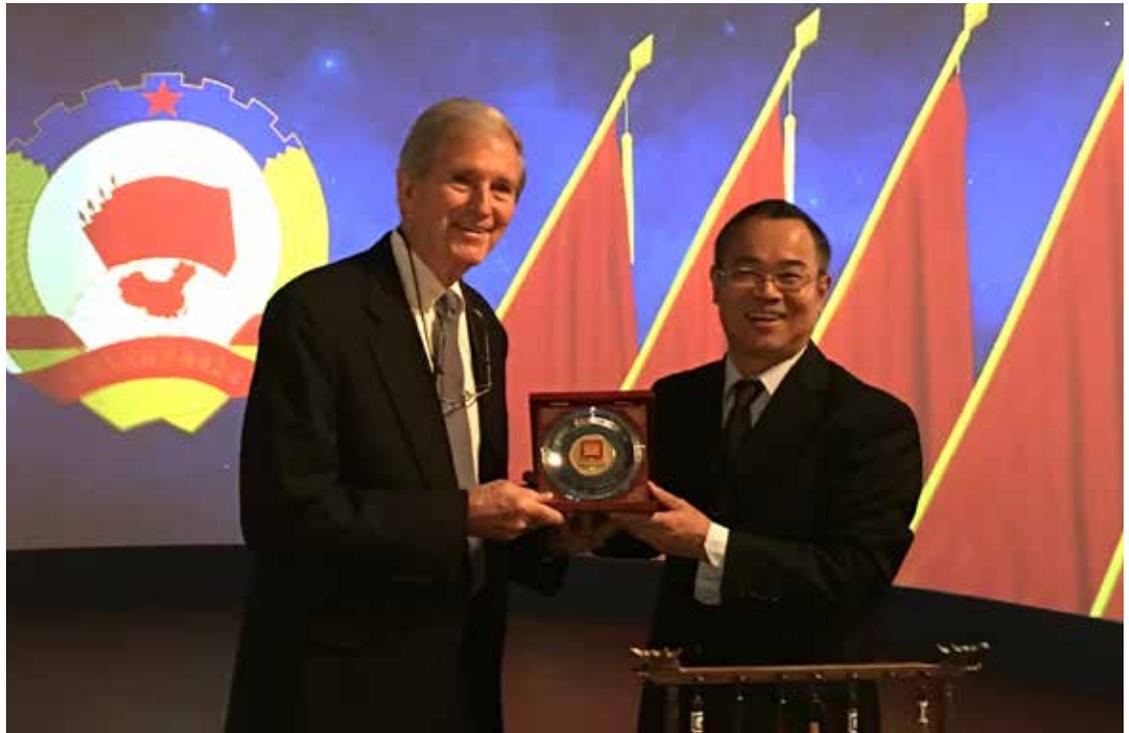
Regrettably, a few forerunners of Kettering programs, among them Harold Saunders, Robert McNamara, former ambassador Huan Xiang, and Li Shenzhi, are no longer with us. Their dedication and contributions will continue to inspire us and forever be remembered.

Thirty years is not a long period of time in world history, but long enough to reflect generational changes. Coming back to my memories of the first encounter with Kettering in 1986, David Mike Lampton greeted us when the Chinese group arrived

on the East Coast from Wisconsin, and accompanied us for the rest of the program. It was my first time meeting Mike in person. At that time, he was already a well-established China scholar, and president-elect of the National Committee on US-China Relations, while I was a "young observer." Since then, the two of us have cooperated with each other in countless Kettering activities. At the time of this writing, Mike is 70 years old,



Despite all the problems and obstacles we have witnessed over the three decades, the China-US relationship has become more mature and increasingly expansive. I hope the torch will be passed into the hands of younger men and women in our two countries for another 30 years.



and I am 68. Some of our students have already taught their own students. Generations of students have been working together to do research on each other country's culture, history, economics, and politics.

Despite all the problems and obstacles we have witnessed over the three decades, the China-US relationship has become more mature and increasingly expansive. I hope the torch will be passed into the hands of younger men and women in our two countries for another 30 years. By the year 2046, will people continue to discuss possible US "containment" of China, or China trying to drive the United States out of the

Western Pacific? Or, will the two countries have fought a catastrophic war, as some observers are predicting today? I hope not. However, that depends very much on the mind-set, wisdom, and vision of the people now in their 20s to 40s, who will be working at Kettering, CASS, Peking University, and elsewhere to shape the future of China-US relations. Noting their close communication with each other and comprehensive understanding of the world, we have reason to remain cautiously optimistic. ■

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