

## Reflections on launching *Technology in Horticulture*

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As a founder of Maximum Academic Press ([www.maxapress.com](http://www.maxapress.com)), I am very excited to launch *Technology in Horticulture* as the first academic journal in the series with a focus on applied technologies. The original 'seeds' for this journal were sown over 40 years ago.

I was raised in a rural area of Jiangsu Province, on the northern side of Shanghai, China. My father was an elementary school teacher, and my mother is a farmer. It is a densely populated area with extremely limited land resources. Almost every piece of available land was used to grow staple crops such as wheat, corn, sweet potato, while every tiny piece of land around houses was cultivated for growing vegetables or for putting up a chicken coop. Due to a very limited cash income, I don't remember eating an apple or an orange, or a juicy peach until I became a teenager. I went through elementary, middle and high school during the 'cultural revolution' when knowledge was little appreciated. As a teenager, I started to help the family to earn 'points' in the commune to get more corncocks, etc. After school in the summer, I spent most of the time collecting weeds to feed a couple of our pigs and chickens. Even though I was the best student in middle school in the entire commune, I was not selected for continuing onto high school. It was frustrating that selection for high school was not based on meritocracy, but rather based on local political powers. Finally, my father managed to use some ad hoc 'connections' so I was finally accepted and completed high school in 1977.

When Deng Xiaoping returned to central power, one of the swiftest changes he made was to renew the national college exam system and to select the best students to enter colleges. This reverted the 10-year practice of the 'cultural revolution' where the eligibility for entering college was determined by political labels and were frequently hand-picked by local officials.

After the college exam was renewed in late 1977, I was very lucky to pass two rounds of examinations to become the first meritocracy-based college student. When deciding what subject to study in college, my father hoped that I would study fruit science so I could work after graduation in the nearby state-owned orchard as a technician (and could bring home some free fruit). Therefore, I enrolled in the Pomology program in Jiangsu Agricultural College. Later, I moved to Nanjing Agricultural College which was closed during the cultural revolution and subsequently reopened in 1979.

Following graduation in February 1982, instead of working as a technician as my father had hoped, I stayed in Nanjing Agricultural University as a teaching/research assistant, working on fruit breeding. Soon I realized that the Bachelor's degree would

not take me very far in academia, so I successfully competed for an English training program for a year. After passing the TOEFL exam, I went to Cornell University for my MS degree with everything paid by a World Bank loan to the Chinese government, and I continued with my Ph.D studies at Cornell, both under the guidance of Dr. Bruce Reisch in Geneva, NY. Rather than studying applied technology which was urgently needed in China at the time, I chose to pursue grape breeding and biotechnology, and was among the first to explore genetic engineering. After graduation, I left fruit science by taking a job in November, 1990 as faculty with North Dakota State University and led the forest tree genetics and biotechnology program for 11 years and served as the Director for the Cellular and Molecular Biology Ph.D program for three years. I continued at the University of Tennessee for another 20 years in a similar area.

Very sadly, my father passed away in 1991, a few months after I started my first job. I did not hear the sad news until a week later because of the lack of telecommunication. Over the last 30 years, every time I went home and saw his portrait, I regretted that I did not bring home some fruit and always thought I could do it later. I frequently asked myself: what can I do to keep his memory alive? What did 'bring home some fruit' mean to him?

Poverty surely limited my father's/my family's imagination. Fourty years ago, 'having some fruit' was considered a luxury as my mother could only grow vegetables near the house, and the best ones were sold in the local farmers' market to exchange for eggs or fish. My parents put their hopes on me! Thirty years later, my family, like nearly all other families in China, no longer need me to 'bring home some fruit', and my mother, now 92 years old, can afford and enjoy nearly all kinds of fruit available in the market. However, there are still millions of families in the world that consider fruit a luxury food or they produce fruit that needs to be sold to generate their only income.

Since my father's death, I have been thinking about the above situation and asking myself: How can I help small farmers 'bring home some fruit'? How can I help farmers to grow better horticultural crops to improve their quality of life in a sustainable environment? For 30 years, however, I have not done much to help! With the establishment of Maximum Academic Press, I wanted to launch a horticultural journal to publish papers on sound horticultural technologies that will be directly applicable to growers and consumers. This dream finally became true after Dr. Jorge Fonseca and Dr. Genhua Niu together agreed to take the helm of editorship. I greatly appreciate Dr. Fonseca and Dr. Niu for sharing my philosophy and leading this journal that will impact horticultural crop

production, storage and improve produce quality and environmental stewardship. I look forward to reading each paper published and helping to build this journal into a leading journal that will achieve and disseminate practical horticultural technology-related information to needy growers worldwide.



This reflection article is dedicated to my father, Bingzhi Cheng, January 25th, 1932 – March 4th, 1991, who hopefully

would know that his son has not forgotten the dream, and now can help many more families bring home some (free) fruit.

### Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

### Dates

Received 3 December 2021; Accepted 6 December 2021;  
Published online 13 December 2021



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