



## The Oregonian

### Portland hosts China's envoy

The ambassador to the U.S. is primed for questions, even those on recalls

Sunday, August 19, 2007

**RICHARD READ**

The Oregonian

China's envoy to the United States won't duck challenging questions during a rare, three-day Portland visit beginning today, according to his aides.

Aside from fielding such perennial issues as the trade deficit and human rights, they say Ambassador Zhou Wenzhong will be ready to confront the main China topic on Americans' minds: product recalls.

"It's unfair to just blame China for that," said Tong Defa, China's consul in San Francisco, referring to the recent recalls of toys and other Chinese-made products. "The ambassador will touch this issue."

Despite various irritants in U.S.-Chinese relations, Zhou arrives during an era of relative bilateral calm, taking the chance to burnish China's image in a largely friendly U.S. region. Oregon and Washington -- which he'll also visit, spending Wednesday in Seattle -- are big exporters to China. Chinese cultural ties are burgeoning in the Pacific Northwest.

Zhou, a career diplomat who has served previously in the United States, will probably play up China's status as Oregon's second-biggest foreign customer behind Canada, spending \$1.39 billion on goods from the state last year. Although he visited Oregon years ago while stationed in California, this visit will be his first to the state as ambassador.

Zhou plans meetings with Gov. Ted Kulongoski, Port of Portland officials, Chinese-community members and managers of several companies doing business with China. He'll talk with administrators of Portland State University, which hosts a new Confucius Institute backed by Beijing to promote Chinese language, culture and teaching. And he'll visit nearby Nike, which depends on Chinese factories to churn out many of its sneakers; China's growing consumer class is becoming addicted to the swoosh.

Zhou can point to ever-closer economic dependence between the United States and China, despite military rivalry and a vast political and social gulf. But he also must confront China's most recent black eye, the mushrooming recalls of unsafe products ranging from toys to tires. The controversy will dog the ambassador and frame his message, predicted Greg Kulander, one of Oregon's most experienced China hands.

"It's damage control," said Kulander, a former consultant and corporate manager who spent 10 years in China and holds a Chinese-studies doctorate. "They're dealing with some very serious image problems on the trade side."

#### Currency concerns, too

Members of Congress are pushing the Bush administration to press China harder on raising the value of its currency, saying the artificially weak yuan boosts China's huge trade surplus. U.S. business leaders complain about corruption and rampant product piracy.

Yet just as China depends on enormous U.S. consumer purchases, the United States counts on the Chinese to invest in its Treasury bonds. Washington and Beijing also have common diplomatic interests, including their participation in six-nation talks to end North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

"If you log back over the history of U.S.-China relations since 1972, things are pretty positive right now," said Joseph Borich, a former U.S. consul general in Shanghai, who heads the Washington State China Relations Council. "I'm guessing that the ambassador is coming out here with an upbeat message about U.S.-China relations."

Taiwan -- which the United States backs, but which Beijing still considers a rebel province -- is not quite the immediate flashpoint it was, given the island territory's close commercial ties with the mainland.

Chinese factories and coal plants shower pollutants on the Northwest and other regions, but U.S.

consumers prime that pump, and Beijing is pushing alternative energy.

Zhou will give the keynote address Tuesday afternoon at a Portland business conference on environmental sustainability.

The ambassador will address broader issues during a World Affairs Council of Oregon luncheon talk that day. There, he could face questions on farther-flung topics, such as Beijing's support of the Sudan government, widely condemned for violence in Darfur. More than 160 people will fill the University Club lunch to capacity; more are clamoring to attend.

### **2008 Olympics**

Zhou would probably prefer to dwell on the 2008 Olympic Games, which will be staged in Beijing a year from now. He can expect friendly questions on that topic as China prepares for world attention, although even the Games aren't immune from politics.

Zhou and his wife, Xie Shumin, are invited to Tuesday dinner with Gov. Ted Kulongoski and his wife, Mary Oberst, at the governor's mansion in Salem. One topic on the agenda: a potential trade trip by Kulongoski to China next year.

A well-connected Portland-area business consultant pressed Zhou to visit Portland, arranging much of the agenda. Jin Lan, founder of Octaxias Co., is executive director of the Oregon committee that coordinates sister-state relations with China's Fujian province.

Seattle has routinely upstaged Portland in attracting high-level Chinese visitors, hosting President Hu Jintao last year. But this time, Borich said, Washington state made the itinerary as an after-thought -- due mainly to a Seattle lawyer who got wind of the Portland visit and suggested the add-on.

Richard Read: 503-294-5135; richread@aol.com

©2007 The Oregonian