

Presentation of Mr. Mutsuyoshi Nishimura,
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“Climate Change and Asia”

As a former climate negotiator, I am capable of indulging in alerting you with facts and statistics about the dire consequences of climate change. However, today I won't do that. Instead I would like to open up a broader perspective for you as I believe it might interest you more.

My key topics today are how to stop a climate catastrophe and what the role of the Asia-Pacific region is in doing so.

The IPCC Fourth Assessment Report (SPM) indicates that short and near-term action aimed at getting GHG emissions to peak and decline is just as important as long-term reduction for climate stability.

In order to stabilize the concentrations of GHG in the atmosphere, emissions would need to peak within of the next 10-15 years and decline thereafter. The lower the stabilization level, the more quickly this peak and decline would need to occur.

Rajendra Pachauri, Chairman of the IPCC, who had gone through tons of scientific studies and large numbers of discussions, had this to say (Nov. 17, 2007 at Valencia, Spain):

“The world would have to reverse the growth of greenhouse gas emissions by 2015 to avert a global climate disaster. If there's no action before 2012, that's too late. What we do in the next few years will determine our future. This is the defining moment.”

Well, if the Nobel Prize-winning Indian scientist is eloquent and compelling, the facts are more so. The US and China together produce 40 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. China is increasing its emissions and is about to overtake the US. Yet, if you go back over the past 150 years, the US is by far the largest emitter in the world, and those gases will remain hundreds of years and cause damage.

Therefore, in a nutshell, without acquitting all the other major emitters, including Japan, from responsibility, the climate and energy actions of the US and China will determine the fate of the planet. These two countries are to bear major responsibilities in saving the planet.

If these two nations act to curb emissions, the rest of the world can more easily coalesce on a global plan. If either fails to act, the mitigation strategies adopted by the rest of the world will fall far short of averting disaster.

So the United States and China must agree and make accommodations to curb

greenhouse gas emissions.

Yet both countries demand that the other take responsibility first. There is a quarrel and it continues.

In my view, first, of course, the US must join us this time. It's so evident. Yet the US is still insisting that US participation be accompanied by Chinese and Indian participation.

Developing countries, on the other hand, argue that, because of their historical responsibilities, the US and all rich countries take the lead.

From my perspective, vision and pressure will solve the stalemate eventually and I am optimistic about the outcome.

I am optimistic because I trust in the good collective judgment of the US leadership on this issue. This is a new global battle to save the planet that can be assimilated with another important battle, the battle to win freedom and democracy decades ago. We finally won the last one largely because of strong and consistent American leadership.

I believe the US after those long tortuous debates will come out with a new sense of leadership that I hope is consistent, robust and unchanging as in the case of the battle for freedom.

A consistent approach by the US leadership is most important. What bothers me and the rest of the world is that the big elephant tends to change its direction every now and then. The abrupt turning of this elephant in 2002 rejecting Kyoto caused havoc. The world cannot tolerate anymore the US going in one direction today and another the next day. A large elephant must fully fathom the impact of its weight as it steps into action.

Now, turning to China, I believe I am optimistic because, as far as I see, China's vision is positive and pragmatic. They are really serious on all this. This I can tell you from my long experience with them. They are virtually tearing down dirty coal-fired power plants one by one. They are forcibly withdrawing old cars. They are giving money out for people to change light bulbs to the right ones.

So all in all, if I deliberately go from a cautious statement as a former diplomat and jump into an unambiguous statement, I am absolutely sure China will come forward more positively in the post-2012 regime for climate cooperation if indeed the US comes on board.

Having said all this, let me offer you yet another perspective that is serious.

We tend to point our fingers at major emitters such as the US and China. And increasingly more so at China rather than the US. Yet the fact is immensely clear that Chinese emissions are due to our consumption.

China is the elephant in the room. It is easy to bash China for all those problems, but we

are not terribly legitimate in that regard because many of the problems that we blame China for we have participated in creating and benefited from, as we use China as an industrial platform. So the finger pointing is a small, simplistic and wrong answer to the big problem of the planet we inhabit.

We are living in a world of global interdependency and of global subcontracting networks. It is global production in which we use China as an industrial platform.

What does this mean? It means that we have to move from the nation-state concept as our mode for understanding. We are talking about global issues but we continuously promote ideas from the perspective of Japan, China, the US and so on.

A nation-state analysis, if we limit ourselves to that, limits our vision of what the answer might be. It also limits our responsibilities and complicity and it highlights our hypocrisy.

On many global issues, a nation-state analysis, a nation-state approach, is no longer legitimate or valid. Issues relating to climate change are a case in point. To save the planet, and to preserve a cooler and pristine earth climate-wise, to create a safer world security-wise, we need a newer vision, a broader perspective that transcends borders.

Therefore, climate change is not an issue for a bunch of negotiators like me, it is indeed an issue for you and for all of us as the nature does not make distinction whether it comes from the US, China and Japan.

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