

Cultural Relativity  
7/25/2022  
Summary Report  
Simeiqi He

### **Bio**

Xie Zhenhua: Xie was the former Vice Chairman of China's National Development and Reform Commission. His leadership and efforts to promote China's domestic efforts to combat climate change and clean China's air and his success in leading the negotiation of the Paris Agreement place him among the world's most influential champions in the fight against climate change. Xie's more recent support of multilateral efforts to mitigate climate change at the second meeting of the Ministerial on Climate Action underscores the importance of his continued engagement. Xie has led the Chinese delegation to the United Nations Climate Conferences since 2007, where he has helped facilitate a series of successful multilateral climate change negotiations.

Chen Lai: Chen is a professor of philosophy department at Tsinghua University and Dean of Academy of Chinese Learning [Guoxue 國學] at Tsinghua University. He has made important contributions to research in Confucian philosophy, especially Song-Ming Ru (Confucian) thought. Chen has held visiting positions in various institutions, including Harvard University (1986-88, 1997, 2006-07), University of Tokyo (1995-96), Kansai University (1999), the Chinese University of Hong Kong (1999-2000), the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (2002), the City University of Hong Kong (2003), Academia Sinica, Taiwan (2004), and National Central University, Taiwan (2008-09). He has published over twelve academic monographs, including (all in Chinese) *A Study of Zhuxi's Philosophy* (1987 & 2000), *Dating of Zhuzi's Letters* (1989), *You Wu Zhi Jing : The Spirit of Wang Yangming's Philosophy* (1991), *Ancient Religion and Ethics: The Roots of Confucianism* (1996), *The World of Ancient Thoughts and Culture* (2002), *Interpretation and Reconstruction: The Spirit of Wang Chuanshan's Philosophy* (2004) and *Studies on Bamboo and Silk Versions of Wuxing and Other Newly Unearthed Confucian Texts* (2009). In 2009, the Joint Publishing Beijing compiled the "Academic Monographs of Chen Lai" series, collecting twelve representative works of Professor Chen.

### **Comments Summary**

Xie Zhenhua:

- Participated in the U.N. Climate Change Conference for over a decade
- As a result of industrialization, climate crisis has become a shared challenge for the whole human family
- The challenge of climate change can only be overcome through global collaboration
- Has been collaborating with Jerry Brown for almost two decades
- Almost four-decade experience working in the field

- Been to the Antarctic twice and Arctic once and has witnessed firsthand the impact of climate change, especially the melting of the ice sheet in the Arctic
- Not only China and US, but the whole world should work together to address the challenge of climate change
- What is China's Ecological Civilization?
  - There is a global consensus regarding sustainable development (with three pillars: social, economic, and environmental) as a response to the environmental crisis brought by industrial civilization
  - In addition to the three pillars of sustainable development, China has proposed the concept of ecological civilization to include the political and the cultural
  - To address the issue of climate change, a political will is needed to achieve sustainability through effective leadership and (infra)structural development
  - The significance of transformation and innovation
  - The development of renewable energy is one of China's contributions
- China-US Collaborations in Addressing Climate Change
  - Has ongoing relationship with Jerry Brown
  - After U.S.'s withdrawal from the Paris Agreement under the Trump administration, there have been three collaborations between Xie and Brown
    - Joint establishment of the California-China Climate Institute
    - Jointly held and served as a co-chair for the 2018 Global Climate Action Summit in San Francisco; promoted collaborations between mayors, entrepreneurs, and NGOs, and met with 17 governors
    - Planned the 2019 Climate Action Summit in New York and discussed collaboration in light of bilateral relations between China and US
  - Worked with John Kerry for almost two decades,
    - have a shared vision for the common good of the earth and future generations, which makes collaboration and conversation possible
- Contribution in the COP conferences
  - Participated in 14 COP conferences as the head of Chinese delegation
  - Played a significant role in conflict resolution
  - The Chinese delegation demonstrated *Zhongyong* in multilateral negotiations
  - The China-US joint declarations helped in arriving at a consensus demonstrated by the Paris Agreement
- The importance of energy system transformation (renewable energy transition)
- Technological innovation is a process
- The role of policy innovation, especially regarding emission reduction; utilizing market economy and the active role of entrepreneurs
- The importance of a social will and international collaborations
- Hopes in 2060, the goal of Paris Agreement can be achieved, the Earth will be better, more harmonious relation between human beings and nature, leaving a sustainable earth for future generations

Chen Lai:

- Compared with ten years ago, the younger generation has been paying more attention to climate change
- Climate change has become a public concern in China
- The idea that human beings are to cultivate a balanced and harmonious relationship with nature has played a central role in Chinese civilization
- Mencius has mentioned, “logging is permitted only in certain times” (Mencius, Book 1A:3); This is to ensure the flourishing of the forests
- The understanding of “take with a proper consideration and use within a proper limit”
- The understanding of proper timing, proper consideration, and proper limit is central to Chinese civilization
- The continuous development of this tradition in Chinese civilization is due to
  - The Confucian teaching regarding the harmonious co-existence of human beings and nature
  - The Daoist view that “[D]ao models itself after Nature” (*Tao-Te Ching*, trans. Wing-Tsit Chan), where human beings should adhere to the rhythm and development of nature
  - The Buddhist teaching about the equality of all sentient beings; there is an intrinsic value in all things, thus we should treat them equally
- Shared cultural and ethical understandings of ecology in China-US dialogue
  - Modern civilization is not conducive to ecological civilization
  - The establishment of an ecological civilization requires expansive and diverse cultural perspectives
  - The significance of a return to ancient wisdoms
  - “The oneness of all things” constitutes the wisdom of ecological civilization
  - Zhuangzi understood that “all things and I are one” (*Equality of Things*, trans. Wing-Tsit Chan). This understanding of the oneness of all things is at the heart of Chinese people for two millenniums
  - Human beings and all things form a community of life; Confucian ethics moves beyond an anthropocentric view to consider a *ren* and love for all things
  - Such ethics regarding the relationship between human beings, nature, and all things serves as a contribution for the conceptualization of ecological civilization
- Chinese policies reflect Chinese culture
- Hopes in 2060, we can realize the ancient ideal and treat natural resources in a balanced and ordered way with moderation