Climate Change and China

London School of Economics

Fu Ying　2009 年 12 月 2 日　18：30

Professor Corbridge,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to talk to you on such an important subject as climate change.

It's a special honour, because the LSE is well-known for its scholarship on climate change and its crucial contribution to this global debate.

China is a huge country with a population of 1.3 billion. It has diverse climatic conditions and a fragile environment. The effect of climate change is a very real threat which we face everyday.

According to Chinese scientists, the average temperature in China has risen by 1.1 degrees centigrade in the last 5 decades. It is higher than the reported global average. We are seeing more frequent bouts of extreme weather in many parts of the country.

Last spring, for example, the most severe drought in 50 years hit northern China affecting the livelihood of 4 million people.

Environmental damage and climate change is a reality for us. Out of the world's most polluted 20 cities, half are in China. 70% of Chinese rivers are polluted to some degree. China has become the largest carbon emitter of the world.

How have we got here? China has reached this stage when it is making great endeavours to lift people out of poverty. Unlike you here, we have condensed 2 centuries of industrialization into only 30 years.

Now, the Chinese people have woken to the threat and, with the same zeal that we have embraced industrialization, we are embracing cleaner development.

In China, climate change is not just a topic for discussion; It's backed up with policy and action throughout the country. Let me share some examples with you.

First, on the legal and policy front. China set forward a

voluntary reduction program for 2006 to 2010 period, including 20% reduction in energy intensity per unit of GDP.

To achieve this, we amended the Law on Energy Saving and the Law on Renewable Energy. We've also set up a strict evaluation system for energy efficiency. This enables the central government to hold provincial leaders accountable for meeting energy efficiency targets.

Last month, the evaluation result for 2008 was released on the web for all to access. Out of 31 provinces and regions, 26 fulfilled emission reduction targets. One can't underscore enough the importance of having such transparency as it places great pressure on those who are not meeting the target.

Beijing is doing better, over-fulfilling its target for 2008, with over 7%. I am sure the Olympics helped. It has already achieved over 17% for the 20% target of 2010. At the bottom, you can see Xinjiang. It is lagging far behind and looks unlikely to meet the target and would need a lot of help.

Secondly, now the industries have to take very tough decisions

to achieve clean development. Projects with high emission can no longer go ahead and some existing high emitters are being phased out.

It is understandably difficult to push through such reforms and there is, inevitably, resistance. Being a developing country, shutting down factories means job losses for many who need them.

For example, we have achieved cutting down the average consumption of coal per unit of power by 20%, by demolishing the high-polluting and inefficient power plants. But it led to the loss of 400,000 jobs.

So the third point is that we have increased and will continue to increase the percentage of cleaner alternative energy sources. Low-carbon and energy conservation have become new growth sectors in China. Many British companies are actively involved in clean development projects in China.

In the first 9 months of this year, clean energy contributed a third of China’s newly added power capacity. China now ranks

as first in the world for solar heating and photovoltaic generation, as well as installed hydro power capacity. You may be surprised to know, 1 in 10 families in China already use solar energy. That includes my family. Many new buildings in Chinese cities are equipped with solar energy. The fact that the Chinese people are so keen to adopt clean energy is an excellent indicator of our dedication to a better future.

Next, let’s talk about trees and reforestation. We all know how trees can absorb CO2 from the atmosphere. Chinese people have really taken tree-planting to heart. It has even become fashionable for young couples to plant trees to mark their wedding. China has planted more trees than any other country in the world, with 2.6 billion trees planted. That is 2 trees per individual, an incredible number.

Last but not least, the only means for China to really achieve its ambitious plan is through science and technology. This is why China is investing heavily in research and development. The country has become a giant laboratory for testing all kinds of clean energy technologies.

In the latest stimulus package worth 400 billion pound, 15% was invested in addressing climate change. I am sure you will agree that it is a huge amount by any standard, especially during the financial crisis.

Thanks to all these efforts, China is well on track to reach our targets set for 2010. That would mean a reduction in CO2 emissions of 1.5 billion tons in five years by 2010. This is an achievement that compares well with the efforts of other countries.

At the UN climate change summit last September, President Hu Jintao stated that China would take even further steps to counter climate change. To follow up, the Chinese government has announced its targets for 2020 based on 2005 levels.

They include:

- bringing down CO2 per unit of GDP by 40-45%,
- increasing the ratio of non-fossil energy to 15%,
- expanding forest coverage by 40 million hectares, that is bigger than one and half times the size of United Kingdom.

We will make all these into compulsory and verifiable targets, within the framework of our domestic development program. I hope you will appreciate that achieving these targets and further reducing emission will get increasingly harder.

Let me elaborate on that point. We have already closed down many of the old and high energy consuming factories, That is to say, the easier part is done.
Between 1990 to 2005, the per unit GDP energy consumption came down by 47% and between 2005 to 2010 it will again come down by 20%. The next will be raising the energy efficiency of the remaining plants. It's going to cost more and involve more sacrifice to reduce further.

This is why investing in research and development is so critical for us, as only innovation can help China to make that leap. And this is why we are looking to developed countries for technology transfer and capacity building.

According to the International Energy Agency, if China fulfils its target for 2020, it will have reduced its emissions of CO2 by 1 billion tons. That will be a great achievement, given that we

are a developing country and we have equally pressing survival priorities.

If you would allow me, I'd like to expand on this point; China may soon become the 2nd largest economy in the world. Yet it remains a developing country. This is something that many people often forget. China's per capita GDP has just passed 3,000 US dollars. UK and US are 13 to 15 times that of China. China is behind Jamaica and Namibia.

Now, let me ask you all a question: In which year in history do you think Britain was at the same income level China now is at? According to British economist Angus Maddison, the answer is the year 1913.

In per capita GDP terms, China only ranks at 104th place in the world. It might be a surprise to some of you that China has 135 million people living under one dollar a day. Sometimes even the most basic things that we take for granted, like water, are beyond the reach of some Chinese people.

Take for example, in China's northwest, water is so scarce that

farmers in a village in Gansu province only take three baths in their entire life, at birth, at marriage and at death.

When discussing climate change, we tend to talk mostly about facts and figures, but we should not forget that, there is also the human dimension. Imagine when electricity reaches this Gansu village, which is what China has been doing, bringing electricity to every village, not only are the farmers able to drill deeper for water, but also their children would be able to watch TV for the first time and see the wonderful outside world. They of course will dream about a better life and all the things that come with it.

Who are we to tell them, that they have no right to have what we have? Who are we to tell them that they can't live like the people in Shanghai or London they see on TV? Why can't they have ipods, laptops and refrigerators, or even cars?

This is the human dimension, and this is the challenge.

China's difficult mission is to enable all of its 1.3 billion people to have the opportunity to realize their dreams, but to achieve it

in an environmentally responsible way.

Now let’s come back to the point about China being the world’s biggest CO2 emitter. If you look at the figures in per capita terms, an average Chinese person’s emission is 4.6 tons. An average American emits 20 tons and Britain 8.7 tons. You can hardly call China energy greedy, can you?

Yet, according to an FT survey, 63% of Americans believe that China is not doing enough and that it should undertake more emission reduction. It feels like a person taking 4 pieces of bread asking the person who got the first piece of bread to go on diet.

Between 1750 and 2005, developed countries accounted for 80% of the world’s CO2 emissions. Even today, with only 20% of the world’s population, developed countries pump more than 55% of the total emissions into the atmosphere. So when it comes to emissions, developed and developing countries can’t be compared like for like, not to be painted in the same brush.

This is why we attach so much importance to the UN

Framework Convention on Climate Change, which set out the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

This is ultimately about fairness and equal right to development. The Copenhagen conference will commence in 5 days' time. It will be a major milestone in the global effort to tackle climate change and the people of the world have high hopes on its outcome. For Copenhagen to be successful, China believes several things need to happen.

First, developed countries should undertake to achieve substantial emission reduction targets for the second commitment period under the Kyoto Protocol. Countries that have not signed up to the Kyoto Protocol should formulate similar reduction targets.

Second, effective mechanisms should be set up to ensure that developed countries provide financial and technological support to developing countries.

Third, developing country should also adopt mitigation measures according to their national conditions, within the

framework of sustainable development and with financial and technological support from the developed countries.

Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao will attend the conference. China is willing to play a constructive role in bringing the negotiations to a successful conclusion. We look forward to close cooperation with the UK and the rest of the world in this process.

All in all, climate change is a global challenge, which can only be resolved through global cooperation. As a mother, I do hope my daughter and the future generations will breathe clean air and live in a good environment. So countries should work together as partners to make sure that our children inherit a better world.

Thank you.