

Welcome to Turning Conscience Into Action, the Earth Charter podcast. Join Mirian Vilela, Earth Charter International Executive Director, in her fascinating conversations with great thinkers, scholars and activists from around the world who are working in the fields of sustainability, ethics, education and social transformation. Our purpose is to generate new insights on how to face current global challenges and inspire informed action.

Hello everyone, welcome to our today's conversation, in which I have the pleasure of receiving and welcoming Professor Yu Miaojie from China. He is the President of Liaoning University, located in Shenyang, Liaoning. Thank you so much for being here with us. Thank you, Mirian. Hello everyone, so it's my honor to be here, and I'm very happy to have an interview here today.

So President Yu, you wrote a book, not long ago, that is focusing on the tension between China and the US on trade imbalance. Can you share with us some comments or the key ideas that you've developed in that book that's part of your research?

Thank you for mentioning this. So the key idea about the book is that I think the free trade is best for two countries. It's not necessary to have the trade war between the two countries. Certainly I understand there's some trade imbalance from the US side, but the best way to fix the trade balance is not to have a trade war, or to have a high trade. But instead, China is able to import more from the States, because when China export more, but on the simultaneously, we also import more. In this way, we are able to increase the welfare of everyone, or say we can make common people's life better.

So I think this is the key idea. Also, there's a famous book called Without Chinese Product, within 365 days. The basic idea is that, well, now because the China product is very competitive, therefore common people cannot live without the Chinese product. So I think the best way is that, well, the Chinese people, they can import more from the other countries to keep the balance, but not have the trade war. So there's the key idea of the book.

So China has been experiencing trade liberalization for the past 30 to 40 years. What do you think has been the impact of that trade liberalization in China and in the world?

Yeah, I think the trade liberalization in China is very important, not only for the Chinese people, but also beneficial to all the rest of the world. So basically, if we look at what we have done in the last four decades also, basically China got the trade liberalization and we also got the export or the empty led gloves. And you can see that it's not only Chinese people, but also the whole world people can benefit from this trade liberalization and also the globalization. So I would say, well, no one will get lost from the trade liberalization, no one will get lost from the globalization. So that is once again, the British is the best.

So how about coming back to China in the US, China and US trade liberalization or trade relations? How do you think that is evolving? In which direction do you think that is taking?

I think the trade talk is the most important thing. So for example, the worst case that we are one country, I mean in post-high-tale route and another country retaliate, I guess that will be the worst case. The most important thing is that people sit together and then let's have the trade talk between the two countries. Once again, if one country complains there is a trade deficit, then the other way is not to have a trade war, but then ask another country to import more. And this is exactly what China want to do because you know now China is trying to import more from other countries. Now we got the Hongqiao forum indeed. This is the seven annual event. The biggest idea is that we are trying to import more from other countries and then to reduce the trade balance, but also make the other countries that can enjoy the better product from China at a lower price.

So this is not only good for China, but also very nice for other countries. But indeed China also want to buy more from other countries because supposedly we have more varieties. This is also good for the Chinese people as well.

So certainly rather than going to a conflict path, it's going to a dialogue path. Exactly. So thank you so much for that. Now the Chinese government with the past couple of years have been emphasizing, highlighting the importance of ecological civilization. And there was a call for everybody in China to contribute to the building of an ecological civilization. Can you share with us what does that mean?

That's true. So ecological civilization is the, basically is one of the most important economic philosophy for China, basically now today. If we look at what we have done, basically China take care of this very much because he put this idea into the constitutions. And the constitution of China. Yes. Yeah. Mention about this very clearly, ecological civilization into the constitution. And then you can see that China indeed was the founding member of the UNCCC in 1997. And also is a founding member of the Kyoto Protocol in 2012.

Climate change Kyoto Protocol. Exactly. And also another one is the Paris Agreement as well. It's a founding member of the Paris Agreement as well. So this key idea is already become a philosophy for the China's economic development. And the key idea here is that we want to make environmental protection as a common feature of the China's whole society. And now, for example, the most important thing is what we call them carbon neutrality and carbon peak.

We are trying to reach the carbon peak in 2030 and then reach the carbon neutrality at 2060. Usually you see a country in light China so huge, right? You need to take the estimation, say 50 years, but China only use 30 years to realize this goal. So this you can see, I mean, how China handle this seriously.

So it's really amazing that the government of China at the highest level is really making a serious commitment to ecological civilization. Not only at the government level, but they are asking for the whole society to jointly contribute to the building of an ecological civilization. So from a Liaoning University point of view, it's a higher education. It's a very important university, higher education in Liaoning, China. What does that mean, this call from the central government that all institutions in China should contribute to the

building of an ecological civilization? So what does it mean for Liaoning University and your commitment to make that happen in your sphere of work and action?

So basically this idea also, I mean, I would say, root to Liaoning University's every faculty and students. So as you just mentioned, I mean, indeed, L and U is Liaoning University abbreviation. L and U is one of the, what we call the double first class university, which means there is first class university and first class discipline in economics. So basically what we want to do is that we try to make L and U better to commit to this ecological civilization. Not only on teaching, but also on research, but also on everyday life. So for example, if you go to our campus, you will realize that well, this better environmental protection is something like come to every people's life, come to every people's blood, I put it this way.

Yeah, for example, on the research, we do have the institution for the environmental economies. We do have the institution for higher education and all even on the institution for higher education. We focus on this ecological civilization. And then for the everyday life, let me give you one example. We asked our faculty members to have the plain, double-page plain, but not single-page plain to save, I mean, the planet and to protect the environment.

Now I know that you, Liaoning University have been committing to education for sustainable development, which is a call from UNESCO. And I would like you, if you can share with us how you see the linkages between the efforts to reorient Liaoning University towards education for sustainable development and its intersection with this effort to align its work to ecological civilization.

That's true. So we put everything to serve for the ecological civilization. And certainly the most key idea is the sustainability development. And then basically from the L and U-Roy-2 is a top, what we call the WIA, so the whole institution approach.

Yeah, from the university, I mean, from our management part, and then from the writer to the vice writer, and then to the dean, and then to each regular faculty members. And even go to the students, no matter it's undergraduate student or graduate students. We work this part very detailed. That's number one. We say, well, not only on your teaching, but also on your research, but also on your everyday life, then you should put the ecological and sustainability into your everyday life. But now, certainly, now I'm very serious.

In China, everyone thinks about sustainability is the most important thing for people, for us to better protect, I mean, the L and U to better protect Liaoning environment and to better protect China and even the rest of the world. So this is the key idea.

So indeed, the university is taking that seriously in the sense of reorienting the work it does in not only in education, but also in research and the way in which the university is engaging with the community and the society.

Absolutely. So we also commit to the community, particularly including the firms, including the private firms and the public firms. We even commit to the governments, including the central government and the local government. And we also have the

commitment toward universities, the interaction about universities, something like this. So basically, the key idea about ecological civilization and then we put everything into this idea. Would you share with us what you think of the Earth Charter and the role it can play as an ethical reference in the effort that you are doing in the Liaoning University? Yeah, I think that the Earth Charter, especially Earth Charter ECI, I mean, the ECI play a non-substitutable, very important, crucial role here.

So we are very lucky, we are very lucky to have the chance to interact with the ECI in the one year, 1.5 years ago. And then after that, I think that the key idea about the ecological civilization spread very fast to every faculty members and the students. And I think that the ECI play a very important role and help us a lot. So we truly appreciate it. So many of your faculty members have been becoming familiar with the Earth Charter to use it as a reference, as a framework for sustainability? Yeah, so I mean, in the teaching and in the research, both teaching and research, they usually, I mean, they put this idea about SDG and also, I mean, the ecological civilization and also the sustainability into their teaching.

For example, let me give you one perfect example. We do have an in-house journal, English journal, called Digital Economy and Sustainability Development. So you can see that the sustainability is the most crucial role in our development. I see that your university is doing a lot of publications in journal, right? Yes. So if you envision, where could you share with us your vision? Where do you want to take? Like if you envision five years from now, what are the transformations you want to make in the university?

What are your dreams or your vision for the future of Yeongning? Yeah, so the vision of the university to me, I mean, also to the faculty members are very clear. We're trying to reach what we call the four goals. Number one is that, well, for those parents, they will send their kids to LNU. When they choose the university, they will say, well, LNU is their top priority. That's number one, because they trust our education. Yeah, number two is that, suppose there was an international conference, very important international conference, our faculty members can have an invitation from that conference.

People say, well, let's look at what do they think from the LNU. So there's number two on the academic. Number three is say, well, on the policy research. If, well, for some important policy suggestion, the central government or the local government will ask, well, let's see what happened for this professor's say, what this professor will say, and then is the consultant from our professors. To contribute. To contribute, to ask about the idea. Researchers and faculties of LNU, they do contribute to policy making.

Yeah, for the policy research as well. And number four is that we will have the social voice. For example, if we have a social event, that we want to have the voice from our university faculty members. Okay, people will say, okay, let's see what do they think. And then what would they, the LNU voice. So this is another, we should have the social voice. So these four goals is my aims for the university. I really want to express my appreciation to your vision and commitment to take LNU to that bright future.

Thank you. Now I would like to share just one point. So many higher, one of the challenges of higher education institutions is to move away from the fragmentation of disciplines. The disciplines are organized in a fragmented manner. And sustainability requires system

thinking and requires interdisciplinary collaboration efforts. Have you considered that as one of the challenges you want to address in your role as the president of LNU? Yes, I see, I can realize these challenges, but indeed I think this is another good opportunity for the Tech of the LNU university to a higher level.

And the reason is that we are, I mean, for the LNU, we are very integrated together. And then, I mean, for example, every policy we can have the top to the bottom and then it will be quick and efficient. And then so we are together, we are in the same team. So I didn't see so much fragmentation in our department, but indeed we see we are united together to work for better LNU. Wonderful. Well, thank you so much. We came to an end of our conversation today. And I appreciate and I wish you really success, very successful in flourishing future so that within five to 10 years from now, people can take a look back and see the important role that you played as the president of the LNU university with that vision.

Thank you so much. Thank you so much.