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Addressing Global Warming: We Have a Journey Ahead, But We Can Make It

My dear children,

Greetings.

By the time you read this letter, my hair will have turned gray. Today, I would like to share with you some thoughts about our times and our expectations for the future.

Over the span of the last century and a half, our world has undergone profound transformations, notably propelled by the strides in science and technology, enriching our lives with countless convenience. Nonetheless, the specters of global warming, environmental degradation, and a myriad of societal issues loom ever large, presenting formidable obstacles to the flourishing and progress of humanity.

My dad would often share stories from his childhood with me, each story becoming vivid picture etched in the canvas of my mind's eye. The winter landscape was a sight to behold, with snow blanketing the trees and icicles adorning the eaves, glistening in the sunlight like exquisite, jade-like crystals. The boundless snow transformed into a children's playground with children gleefully building snowmen, enjoying snowball fights, and frolicking in the wintry wonderland. In summer, with the frogs croaking, the cicadas chirping, and the fireflies dancing, my dad and his friends as little boys would enjoy themselves trapping cicadas in the trees and going to the river to catch fish, shrimp, and crabs barehanded, enjoying the warmth of the sun and the cool in the shade.

I used to ask my father why we hardly ever saw snow or heard cicadas singing in the city where I grew up. He told me that the world is growing warmer. Hundreds of millions of tons of greenhouse gases are released into the atmosphere each year, trapping energy from the sun and wrapping the Earth in a blanket, a phenomenon commonly referred to as the "greenhouse effect".

This greenhouse effect has set off a chain reaction leading to global warming, rising sea levels, increased pest and disease outbreaks, and a host of other challenges. It is also closely connected to extreme weather events such as heavy rainfall and high temperatures which dominate our news feeds.

Dad once showed me a cartoon stamp issued by Greenland in 2010. The top half, from 1990, had a polar bear standing on a big ice floe waiting for a seal to pop up for air, a smart move since a big meal could keep him fed for weeks. The bottom half, from 2010, 20 years post-global warming, had a wretched polar bear on the last tiny piece of ice, eyeing seals just out of reach, hungry and struggling to find food. I could really sense the sadness and hopelessness of the polar bear when I saw this stamp.

It was dad's story that got me thinking about global warming for the first time, and that's when three burning questions popped into my head: Do we have to change? Are we even capable of changing? And, most importantly, will we change?

I researched this: and in the last hundred years or so, the average yearly global temperature has risen by around 1 degree Celsius. If things don't change, the sweet memories of my dad's childhood might become a thing of the past for kids of the future. If things stay the same, by 2050, at least 400 bird species will be severely threatened worldwide. By 2120, that number will have shot up to over 8,700 species!

Since my era, people have caught on to the repercussions of the greenhouse effect and have started making moves to dial it back, with us in China pitching in significantly along the way. Let's take, for instance, how our government now imposes a "carbon tax" on airlines, shipping companies, and heavily polluting factories.



We also have major investments in clean energy like solar, wind, and hydrogen. What's more, everyone is encouraged to abandon their cars in favor of using public transit, walking, or biking. China's been going big on renewable energy projects, cutting back on fossil fuels and CO2 emissions big time. Now, you see solar water heaters on rooftops and electric cars cruising the streets. I believe that, by working together, we can totally turn the tide on this greenhouse effect mess!

My dear children, this is your time! Remember that each and every action you take contributes to making the world a better place. Regardless of where you find yourselves, we all share this planet's destiny and breathe the same air. It's crucial for you to shoulder the responsibility of your era, address climate change. I hope when you come to my city, it is still intact. If it is, I hope you enjoy the beautiful ice formations and snow in winter, and the sweet sounds of cicadas and frogs singing in summer!

I wish you have a beautiful Earth and a bright future!

Best regards,

Cheng Zihan

A handwritten signature in black ink, located at the bottom right of the page. The signature is stylized and appears to be the name 'Cheng Zihan'.