

Yunhua Liu, China. [A project descriptive essay on the Earth Charter as an inspiration for environmental education as it relates to Principle 14](#)

The Earth Charter and Development of China's National Guidelines for Environmental Education in the School Curriculum



Yunhua Liu began teaching in rural primary and middle schools in remote areas of China during the Cultural Revolution, then teaching overseas after graduation from Guangzhou Institute of Foreign Languages. In 1996, she joined WWF and spear-headed the China Environmental Educators' Initiative (EEI), which formed a partnership with twenty-one teachers' universities. She is advising the Shangri-la Sustainable Community Initiative, which empowers local Tibetan communities to participate in decision-making for natural resource management and cultural restoration. She finds the Earth Charter to be an inspiration in her work, providing an ethical framework and a model for building consensus to achieve a common vision.

of Education for Sustainability centres across the country in twenty-one teacher training universities; it has trained a core team of practitioners within these universities. These expert practitioners, in turn, have provided training for hundreds of thousands of teachers throughout the country, including three thousand teacher advisors who are on the staff of provincial education bureaus.

One important achievement of the EEI has been development of China's National Guidelines for Environmental Education for primary and middle schools. The development of this document took four years, during which time the developers were greatly

inspired by the Earth Charter. This inspiration can be seen from two specific aspects.

First, the framework of the National Guidelines was developed through a long process of consultation between government officials, non governmental organizations, teachers, and students. The Earth Charter helped all those involved to clarify the ethical framework of sustainability. Secondly, the process of the Earth Charter's formulation provided a model for the process of achieving goals for environmental education, and specifically provided inspiration to overcome difficulties that at times seemed insurmountable.

The Earth Charter has been inspirational in China as a framework and tool for people striving for a sustainable future. A major example is the experience of working on the national programme "Education for Sustainability." World Wide Fund for Nature China Programme Office began its Environmental Educators' Initiative (EEI) in 1996 as a joint initiative with the State Ministry of Education supported by the British Petroleum Company. The goal of EEI is to incorporate education for sustainability in the curricula of China's primary and secondary schools. The program has created a national network



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Principle 14. Integrate into formal education and life-long learning the knowledge, values, and skills needed for a sustainable way of life.

In fact, sometimes during the four-year process of developing the Guidelines, it seemed impossible that a consensus would ever be achieved among the thousands of stakeholders for an approach to building sustainability. The ideas about the purpose, scope, approach, specific contents, and implementation mechanism for the guidelines initially put forward by more traditional practitioners was quite different from those proposed by reformers. One major objective of the national curriculum reform was for China's students to master more scientific knowledge in order to make China more competitive in the global economic market. This, at first, seemed quite different from, and almost irreconcilable with, the stated goals of Education for Sustainability – to empower students to become informed and active citizens of an ecologically sustainable, socially just, and democratic society. The traditional content of the curriculum focused on scientific knowledge and the mastery of facts about the environment, whereas the focus of environmental sustainability was to help students to obtain a more holistic view of their world, including social, economic, and political understanding in addition to knowledge of the physical and natural world. Instead of the traditional approach of students being passive recipients of instruction, the reformers planned for the guidelines to promote a new way of learning that was inquiry-based, student-centered, interactive, relevant to the lives of the students, and linked to their cultural traditions. Given the ambitious goals for reform, the challenges were understandable, making development of the Guidelines a long and difficult process.

In the end, the partners reached agreement on the Guidelines through a process of compromise and consensus-building. For the first time, China has guidelines for national environmental education that are actually being implemented across the country, benefiting two hundred million students. It is also the first time that a non governmental

organization has had a leading role in development of such an important government policy.

The ethical framework that the Earth Charter represents, and the road that was taken to formulate the environmental education document, have been an inspiration for many of those involved in the process in China. The Earth Charter will remain an inspiration for future work as people in the field of education in China come together to revise the guidelines and bring them even more in line with the concepts and approaches of education for sustainable development. ●