

## Aligning Global Sustainability Governance with Chinese IPE: A Model for Global Citizenship Education

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### Abstract

This study examines the integration of global sustainability into China's ideological and political education (IPE) curriculum, responding to the urgency of global environmental crises and UNESCO's call for transformative education. Employing a sequential mixed-methods approach, it investigates how the "community with a shared future for mankind" and UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can be systematically embedded in IPE to enhance students' global environmental literacy and political participation in environmental governance. The "Ideology-Governance-Action" (IGA) Tridimensional Curriculum Model, implemented at Southwest Jiaotong University Hope College, aligns learning objectives with the Paris Agreement and China's "ecological red line" policies via case-based learning, simulated UN climate negotiations, and NGO-led service-learning projects. Post-reform outcomes—72% increased SDG awareness up from 28% and 45% extracurricular sustainability engagement up from 15%—coupled with qualitative evidence of students critiquing "Western-centric" narratives and proposing China-led "ecological civilization" solutions, demonstrate feasibility and effectiveness. While faculty face interdisciplinary collaboration and resource challenges, the model offers emerging-economy higher education institutions (HEIs) a replicable framework to balance national sovereignty and global citizenship, with implications for curriculum design, faculty development, and student-led sustainability initiatives.

### Keywords

Global sustainability governance, ideological and political education, shared future for mankind, SDGs, global citizenship education, ecological civilization.

### Introduction

Since the 1870s, Global Citizenship Education has become an important part of the wave of globalization. Specifically in the field of education, from Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (Freire, 2000) to Michael W. Apple's "Education and Power" (Apple, 1995), Latin

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American and North American societies have begun to reflect since the 1960s and 1970s. Influenced by the Japanese scholar Takeuchi Yoshimi (Takeuchi, 2005), in the past two decades, the concepts of "taking Asia as a method" proposed by Asian scholar Chen Guangxing (Chen, 2010) and "taking oneself as a method" proposed by Xiang Biao (Xiang & Wu, 2022) have echoed each other and have had an increasingly profound impact in the field of education.

The "Education 2030 Action Framework" released by UNESCO calls on all countries to adopt sustainable development Education on human rights, gender equality, cultural peace and non-violence, world citizenship, and appreciation and contribution to cultural diversity ensures that all learners possess the knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development and become responsible "global citizens" (UNESCO, 2016). In China, since ancient times, there have been sayings like "the world belongs to the public" and "view the country from the perspective of the state and the world from the perspective of the world". As an important institution for cultivating global citizens, it is imperative for universities to carry out global citizenship education. In addition, global environmental crises, including climate change, biodiversity loss and plastic pollution, have reached an unprecedented level of urgency. The Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (2023) points out that if no immediate mitigation actions are taken, global temperatures are expected to exceed pre-industrial levels by 1.5° C before 2040 (IPCC, 2023). Meanwhile, the United Nations' 2023 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Progress report shows that only 15% of the 169 goals are advancing as planned, and environmental goals such as SDG 13 Climate Action and SDG 14 Life Underwater are significantly lagging (United Nations, 2023).

In response, Global higher education institutions (HEIs) were required to incorporate global sustainability into their curricula. The UNESCO 2020 Global Action Plan for Education on Sustainable Development (GAP) Roadmap calls for "transformative education" to equip students with the ability to address complex sustainability challenges (UNESCO, 2020)

The research objectives are: i) to develop a systematic integration framework for a comprehensive and structured framework for integrating the concept of a "community with a shared future for mankind" and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into China's ideological and political education (IPE) curriculum; ii) to enhance political action ability by utilizing ideological and political education as a platform to cultivate students' political action capabilities in engaging with global environmental governance; iii) to bridge policy and practice gaps identifying and addressing the gaps between China's domestic sustainable policies and international sustainability frameworks through IPE. By doing so, the research aims to ensure that students are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate and contribute to both national and global sustainability initiatives effectively.

The concept of Global Citizen can be traced back to ancient Greece, when the Stoics proposed that everyone should give birth to themselves. The native land still belongs to the universal human community. Oxfam, a charity organization, defines a global citizen as being aware of the vastness of the world and being a part of it. Respect and cherish diversity; Understand how the world operates in terms of economy, society, culture, technology and environment; Anger towards social injustice participates in local and even global affairs and makes contributions; the

original means to act for world equality and sustainable development; Be responsible for their actions (Oxfam, 1997).

The founders of the constructivist learning theory were Piaget (1950) and Vygotsky (1978), who respectively proposed the cognitive development theory and the socioculturalism theory, emphasizing that knowledge is constructed through the interaction between the individual and the environment. Bruner (1960) systematically applied it to the field of education, while von Glasersfeld (1995) developed radical constructivism, further deepening the influence of this theory in teaching practice. This theory has received academic support from the team of Pan et al. (2022) from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and scholars such as Xu & Chen (2020) from Peking University, forming a theoretical framework that combines policy guidance and academic systematics.

The embryonic form of China's ecological civilization theory can be traced back to the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 2007, where Hu Jintao first proposed the concept of "ecological civilization." President Xi Jinping elevated it to a national strategic priority after 2012, introducing the core tenet that "lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets." (Xi, 2017) This theory has received academic endorsement from scholars such as Pan Jiahua's (Li & Pan, 2023) team at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) who have contributed to shaping a theoretically systematic and policy-oriented framework.

The usefulness of this study is multi-faceted. For higher education institutions in emerging economies, it offers a replicable curriculum model that aligns global sustainability governance with ideological and political education, balancing national sovereignty and global citizenship. The "Ideology - Governance - Action" model, implemented at Southwest Jiaotong University Hope College, has proven effective in enhancing students' global environmental literacy and political participation in environmental governance, as evidenced by increased SDG awareness and extracurricular sustainability engagement. It also equips students to critique "Western - centric" narratives and propose China - led solutions like "ecological civilization." For faculty, the study provides insights into challenges such as lack of interdisciplinary collaboration and resource constraints, offering practical suggestions like establishing an interdisciplinary sustainable development center and encouraging publication in global sustainable governance journals. For policymakers, it highlights the need to set up IPE modules on sustainable development goals and fund teacher development projects. Overall, this study serves as a valuable guide for HEIs to integrate global sustainability into education, fostering a new generation of globally - minded and responsible citizens.

## **Methodology**

A sequential mixed-methods approach was employed, integrating qualitative case studies, quantitative surveys, and classroom-based action research to enable triangulation of findings across policy, curriculum, and student engagement levels. A case study was conducted on the curriculum integration of An Introduction to Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era and Situation and Policy at Southwest Jiaotong University Hope College, a private application-oriented undergraduate institution in Sichuan Province, to examine how its vocational-focused curricula align with national sustainability education policies. The

analysis revealed pedagogical innovations such as "community-based project learning", local ecological governance initiatives to operationalize SDG-related knowledge, curriculum adaptability by embedding sustainability topics, "dual carbon" targets into applied engineering and business programs, and policy-practice synergy through partnerships with local governments and NGO's Green Chengdu to bridge policy dissemination and student engagement, thereby providing insights into the role of regional institutions in translating national sustainability strategies into actionable education.

A stratified random sampling survey was administered via the Chaoxing Learning Platform to 600 undergraduate students at Southwest Jiaotong University Hope College (50% STEM majors, 50% humanities/social sciences). The survey assessed students' awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their political participation in sustainability-related initiatives. Concurrently, a questionnaire was distributed to 30 ideological and political education (IPE) instructors to identify barriers to integrating global sustainability governance into curricula. The following are representative questions designed for the survey, how familiar are you with the core policies related to "global sustainability governance" (e.g., UN SDGs, Paris Agreement, China's "ecological red line" policy)? How difficult is it for you to obtain interpretation materials for the policies during lesson preparation? What are the key barriers you face when integrating global sustainability governance content into IPE courses? What is your satisfaction level with the relevant support provided by your university/educational authorities for the "integration of sustainability governance policies and IPE"? These questions focus on instructors' perceptions of integrating global sustainability governance into IPE curricula, covering dimensions such as policy familiarity, access to interpretation materials, implementation barriers, and institutional support. The findings revealed that 68% of instructors cited "lack of detailed policy interpretations" as a critical obstacle, indicating a disconnection between policy dissemination and classroom implementation.

Additionally, 20 semi-structured student interviews and 10 focus groups (5 – 8 students each) were conducted during class to co-design curriculum modules and explore students' perceptions of IPE's relevance to global sustainability. The process addressed the following questions: What are the core purposes of these courses? Have you heard of concepts like "global sustainable governance", "UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)" or China's "ecological red line" policy? Is there a connection between IPE courses and global sustainability issues (e.g. climate change, biodiversity loss), and why? Can you illustrate the relationship between IPE content (e.g. a community with a shared future for mankind) and SDGs with examples, and how to clarify this connection better in class? For joint curriculum module design, which global sustainability aspects (e.g., the Paris Agreement, China's "dual carbon" goals, local environmental projects) should be integrated into IPE? Does current IPE content lack sustainability-related themes/views, and if so, what are they? Beyond existing case-based learning and UN climate negotiation simulations, what other activities (e.g. NGO field trips, project-based learning, expert lectures) could help you understand the link between IPE and sustainable development? What do you hope to gain from integrating global sustainability into IPE? Will there be challenges in learning about sustainable development through IPE? The findings from interviews and focus groups showed students' views focused on three areas: growing awareness of IPE-sustainability relevance, demand for practical learning, and support for China-led sustainable development

solutions—aligning with the study's quantitative results. Post-reform, 72% of students had improved awareness of SDGs.

Initially, many students saw IPE as "theoretical and disconnected from daily life" and did not understand how SDGs related to "Situation and Policy" courses. After discussing curriculum integration, they realized concepts like "a community with a shared future for mankind" were not just slogans but directly tied to addressing global issues like climate change. For example, China's "ecological red line" policy (State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2011) and the Paris Agreement both aim to protect the environment, and IPE explains how China balances national interests with global responsibilities (United Nations, 2015). Some students previously ignored sustainable development news, thinking it unrelated to their studies—until IPE classes discussed "Belt and Road" green infrastructure projects, revealing links between China's actions and SDGs, making sustainable development feel tangible rather than distant.

Students emphasized passive learning was ineffective and called for more interactive, hands-on activities. "Model UN climate negotiations were my favorite part—representing different countries to discuss carbon reduction targets helped me understand how agreements like the Paris Agreement work, which is better than lectures," one student said, suggesting more role-plays (e.g. simulating NGO cooperation to reduce rural waste, as mentioned in class). Another noted, "Case-based learning is good, but I want to take action. We should not just talk about sustainable development but practice it—this would make IPE more useful." Overall, semi-structured interviews and focus groups provided first-hand insights into students' views on IPE and global sustainability.

This research, based on the data collection of the survey, involved 600 undergraduate students and 30 IPE lecturers from the Hope College of Southwest Jiaotong University. It was permitted by the School of Marxism of the Hope College of Southwest Jiaotong University. Before the project was initiated, it adhered to the international ethical standards for social science research and the regulations for human research projects in higher education in China. For students, informed consent is provided through the Chaoxing Learning platform, clearly defining the purpose of the survey, anonymous data collection/storage, voluntary participation and withdrawal rights. The survey is conducted outside the prescribed class hours, and the results are separated from academic performance and do not include sensitive or harmful content. For teachers, the same consent process also applies. Responses are marked with department codes, voluntary participation, and feedback is used for summary analysis.

## **Results and Discussion**

The "Ideology-Governance-Action" (IGA) Tridimensional Curriculum Model, comprising interconnected ideological, integrating the "shared future for mankind" and SDGs into learning objectives, governance aligning content with the Paris Agreement and China's "ecological red line" policies), and action dimensions student-led campus carbon audits, was implemented through pedagogical strategies such as case-based learning, simulating UN climate negotiations and analyzing Belt and Road green infrastructure projects, service-learning rural waste reduction campaigns with NGOs, and digital tools.

Post-reform, 72% of students reported increased SDG awareness, and 45% engaged in extracurricular sustainability activities (up from 28% and 15%, respectively), while qualitative data highlighted their ability to critique "Western-centric" narratives and propose China-led alternatives like "ecological civilization." However, faculty faced challenges, including 60% citing "lack of interdisciplinary collaboration" and 45% reporting resource constraints, limited digital tools and international opportunities.

The IGA model indicates that integrating global sustainable governance with ideological and political courses in Chinese universities is feasible and effective. By integrating the sustainable development Goals and the concept of a "community with a shared future for mankind" into the curriculum, higher education institutions can cultivate citizens with global capabilities who can conduct cross-border environmental governance, while strengthening China's role as a leader in sustainable development.

Regarding practical suggestions, we hope to establish an interdisciplinary sustainable development center to bridge the gap between IPE, environmental science and international relations departments.

Encourage teachers to publish articles in global sustainable governance journals and participate in international conferences on sustainable development education. Regarding policymakers, IPE modules focusing on sustainable development goals can be established in higher education institutions, and teacher development projects can be funded. It is suggested to launch a speech contest on "Youth Sustainable Development" to support student-led initiatives.

In addition, we have noticed that in integrating sustainable development into the higher education curriculum of the United Arab Emirates, researchers have mentioned that strengthening cooperation among academic institutions, strategic industry partnerships, and significant investment in teacher development are keyways to advance the global citizen sustainable development agenda (Abo-Khalil, 2024). It also provides methods and guidance for this research.

In the future, longitudinal studies will continue to follow up on students' sustainable career paths after graduation, such as employment in green industries and policy advocacy. A Comparative Analysis of the Integration of Global Sustainable Governance in STEM and Humanities IPE Courses.

## Conclusion

This study explores the integration of global sustainability into China's IPE curriculum to address global environmental crises and UNESCO's call for transformative education, with Southwest Jiaotong University Hope College as a case. Employing a sequential mixed-methods approach, it develops and tests the "Ideology-Governance-Action" (IGA) Tridimensional Curriculum Model, which embeds "a community with a shared future for mankind" and UN SDGs into IPE via case-based learning, simulated UN climate negotiations, and NGO-led service-learning. Post-reform outcomes—72% increased SDG awareness up from 28% and 45% extracurricular sustainability

engagement up from 15%—alongside students’ ability to critique "Western-centric" narratives and propose China-led "ecological civilization" solutions, demonstrate the model’s feasibility and effectiveness in enhancing students’ global environmental literacy and political participation in sustainability governance. While faculty face challenges like limited interdisciplinary collaboration and resources, the IGA model offers emerging-economy HEIs a replicable framework to balance national sovereignty and global citizenship, providing insights for curriculum design, faculty development, and policy support for IPE-sustainability integration. For future research, longitudinal tracking of students’ post-graduation sustainable career paths and comparative analyses of sustainability integration in STEM and humanities IPE courses could further enrich understanding of the model’s long-term impact.

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