

WHAT POSSIBLE TRANSFORMATIVE VALUES NATURE EDUCATION CAN
PROVIDE TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY?
A CASE STUDY OF YUNNAN ZAIDI NATURE EDUCATION CENTRE IN CHINA

Shuangying Yu, GPSS, ID 47-166830

Advisor: Associate Professor Mayumi FUKUNAGA

Co-Advisor: Associate Professor Motoharu ONUKI

ABSTRACT

Environmental Education (EE) in China, developing from 1972, was oriented by the government for a long time. Such formal EE is usually knowledge-based and only takes place in the classrooms. Nature Education (NE), emphasizing more on experiences in the natural environment and taking a more humanistic method, has been a bottom-up trend of informal EE in China since the first decade of twenty-first century. As NE is a new social phenomenon in China, there is a lack of researches on how NE can possibly transform people and society in China's context.

The researcher uses transformative value as the key concept for analysis. Encountering with nature and education is a process to transform people and such topics go beyond the traditional discussion on values of nature, i.e. instrumental value and intrinsic value.

To find transformative values of NE toward a sustainable society, the researcher firstly depicted the history and current practices of EE in China by using expert interview, document review and participant observation. The development of NE in China has been influenced by EE from countries such as the U.S. and Japan. Besides, it has its own core based on the Chinese culture as well. After examining the history and general practices of NE in China, Yunnan Zaidi Nature Education Center was selected as a case study to investigate the details on the transformative values of NE because it covers various types of NE activities and is a typical NE organization. Semi-structured in-depth interviews toward educators, parents and

children were conducted as the major research method, supplemented with literature review and participant observation.

The research results revealed that NE engagers had experienced transformations on understanding of nature and human development. Children transformed their understanding of nature from an equal relationship with nature towards nature being more powerful than human, knowledge about nature and fun in nature. Parents developed stronger environmental stewardship. Educators developed the idea that nature is more powerful than human, as well as stronger environmental stewardship. As for human development, children gained teamwork skills, friendship, confidence, better physical health, better mental health and creativity, while parents gained better mental health and understanding of child's perspectives. Educators gained confidence. Such transformations on understanding of nature and human development led to individual environmental behavior and enhanced social recognition and impact through collective actions. Individual environmental behavior includes more adventurous with nature (children), empathy toward nature (children, educators), reduce, reuse, recycle (parents), waste segregation (parents), reducing waste production (educators), and responsible consumption (for educators). To achieve larger social recognition and impact, NE engagers conducted collective actions to raise citizens' environmental awareness, motivate citizens' engagement and cooperate with grass-roots administrations. Such individual environmental behaviors and collective environmental actions can contribute to the environmental well-being which serves as a crucial dimension of a sustainable society.

Despite the transformative values NE has as this research disclosed, it is still difficult for NE to directly exert impact on decision-makers because of the Chinese regime. However, the Chinese government has started to promote NE since 2014. While it provides new opportunities for NE, how to deepen the cooperation between bottom-up and top-down EE remains a future challenge for China.

Key words: Environmental Education, Nature Education, Transformative value, Environmental behavior