The Triple Construction of Ecological Image in Qinghai Province through Harmonious Discourse

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Abstract：This paper, grounded in the theory of Harmonious Discourse Analysis, conducts an empirical study of Qinghai Province's ecological policy texts by integrating corpus linguistics methods such as high-frequency word statistics and collocation analysis. The study reveals that Qinghai's ecological discourse, under the coordinated guidance of the principles of conscience, proximity, and constraint, manifests three construction paths: cultural-driven, institutional authority, and public participation. These paths reflect the discourse's composite functions in shaping cultural identity, political legitimacy, and social mobilization. Together, they form a multidimensional discursive framework for regional ecological communication and offer practical insights for optimizing government discourse and communication strategies.

Introduction

As the "Water Tower of China" and an ecological security barrier, Qinghai Province is a multi-ethnic region where ecological civilization building is not only a matter of environmental protection but also an important means of promoting national unity and cultural identity. It conveys ecological values while serving as a vehicle for strengthening social cohesion and shared cultural understanding. In recent years, the Qinghai government has actively shaped ecological images such as "Green Qinghai" and "Ecological Highland" through policy texts. However, systematic research on the strategic construction of ecological discourse remains underdeveloped.

Ecological discourse analysis focuses on the ecological attributes of language and typically draws guidance from general ecological philosophy. This aligns well with the ethical spirit embodied in the three principles of Harmonious Discourse Theory: the principle of conscience, the principle of proximity, and the principle of constraint. Accordingly, research on Qinghai's ecological discourse not only helps to uncover the government's policy dissemination strategies but also deepens understanding of how ecological narratives influence public attitudes. This study adopts the Harmonious Discourse Theory as its framework and employs high-frequency word analysis, collocation patterns, and corpus linguistic techniques to reveal how the ecological image of

Qinghai is constructed linguistically. It aims to provide a new empirical perspective for regional ecological discourse studies and to promote the localized application of ecological discourse theory in China.

Harmonious Discourse Analysis, rooted in China's socio-cultural context and developed by Chinese scholars, is problem-oriented and informed by China's development realities and philosophical traditions. It localizes and sinicizes ecological discourse studies by emphasizing the ecological ethics implied in three core principles. The principle of conscience refers to ecological awareness arising from an inner reverence and affection toward nature, guiding people's judgment of ecological value and moral standards, thus influencing ecological behaviors in practice. The principle of proximity discerns the closeness of human relationships with others, animals, the natural environment, and natural resources from an anthropocentric viewpoint, representing a concrete expression of human-centered ethics. The principle of constraint, spanning individual, community, and national levels, entails the normative function of discourse that regulates human behaviors to protect the ecological environment. This theory offers an analytical tool for investigating the interplay of authority, affect, and normativity in Qinghai's ecological discourse.

Ecological discourse has gained widespread scholarly attention as a tool for environmental governance and policy dissemination. Stibbe (2015) posits that ecological discourse not only conveys environmental information but also plays a crucial role in shaping ecological awareness. Dryzek (2013) classifies environmental discourse into reformist and radical types, with reformist discourse (e.g., sustainable development) becoming the mainstream framework in government ecological policies. This framework provides a solid foundation for analyzing how the Qinghai government uses policy discourse to construct ecological images. Huang Guowen (2018) introduces Harmonious Discourse Theory, highlighting the triple ethical functions of language—conscience, proximity, and constraint—which offers a new perspective for this research. Existing studies have primarily focused on global environmental policies or national ecological discourse, with relatively little attention paid to how local governments construct regional ecological images through policy language. Meanwhile, analyzing language that both reflects and constructs reality from an ecological standpoint represents an emerging direction in linguistic research. Thus, from the three dimensions of institutional authority, cultural guidance, and public participation, this study explores the triple construction path of Qinghai's ecological image under the framework of Harmonious Discourse Theory.

1.Research Methods and Design

This study uses policy documents published on the official website of the Qinghai Provincial Government under the section "Government Information Disclosure" as the primary corpus. Keywords such as "ecological civilization," "ecological red line," "ecological construction," and "ecological protection" were used to search relevant documents. Through manual screening, policy documents with formal structure and

ecological relevance were selected. After removing redundant symbols, invalid content, and duplicate entries, a clean corpus of 206,532 Chinese characters was compiled.

This study selects key ecological policies issued by the Qinghai Provincial Government between 2016 and 2024, which are highly representative and systematic. In addition to keyword screening, manual review and expert opinions were incorporated to ensure that the corpus not only embodies policy effectiveness but also reflects ecological value orientations. This approach guarantees the normative quality of the corpus and enhances the practical significance of the analytical results[1-3].

For corpus construction, the study utilized the Corpus Word Parser for segmentation and part-of-speech tagging. The texts were exported in TXT format. AntConc 4.3.1 was then employed to perform frequency and collocation analysis. Additionally, the study further identifies the value orientations and emotional attitudes conveyed in the texts through analyses of keyword co-occurrence relationships and semantic collocations. This analytical approach, which integrates quantitative methods with interpretive analysis, helps reveal the ideological tendencies behind policy discourse while enhancing the objectivity and persuasiveness of the analytical results. To identify statistically significant collocations, two parameters were applied: Likelihood (L) and Effect size (E). Likelihood measures the statistical significance of co-occurrence between two words—higher values suggest stronger association. Effect size evaluates semantic strength and functional cohesion in context—higher values indicate greater expressive impact.

This study sets thresholds of $L \geq 50$ and $E \geq 2.0$, which allow for the extraction of collocations that are not only statistically robust but also semantically meaningful. These metrics help uncover implicit discursive structures in the policy texts and support the identification of dominant narrative patterns in Qinghai's ecological discourse[4-5].

2.Discourse Feature Analysis

The principles of conscience, proximity, and constraint do not operate in isolation within Qinghai's ecological policy texts. Instead, they interact through specific lexical patterns, institutional terminologies, and action-oriented frameworks to collectively construct diverse ecological images. Each principle guides a distinctive path of image construction, which can be categorized into three types: institutionally authoritative, culturally driven, and publicly participatory. These discourse types reflect the central themes and value orientations in Qinghai's ecological narrative. This section first presents high-frequency word analysis, followed by collocation analysis under each of the three principles to demonstrate how the discourse structure supports these ecological identities[6-8].

Using AntConc 4.3.1, high-frequency words were extracted and categorized based on part of speech, semantic field, and their discursive function. The analysis revealed that terms like "ecology" (生态, 2456 times), "protection" (保护, 979 times), "construction" (建设, 1113 times), "institution" (制度, 310 times), and "green" (绿色,

568 times) formed the core vocabulary of Qinghai's ecological discourse. These terms correspond to three dominant discursive orientations: strengthening governance systems, shaping cultural identity, and invoking ecological values.

For instance, "ecology" serves as a thematic core and appears in central phrases like "ecological civilization construction," "ecological security barrier," and "ecological red line." It reflects the moral and ethical centrality of ecological values, aligning with the principle of conscience. The word "green" frequently collocates with development, transition, and energy (e.g., "green

development," "green transformation"), and functions as an emotive trigger—inviting public identification and linking with the principle of proximity. Terms like "construction," "protection," and "institution" represent structured governance and policy enforcement, thus aligning with the principle of constraint.

Overall, the distribution of these high-frequency words suggests a synchronized effort to institutionalize ecological values, promote cultural resonance, and mobilize societal behavior—providing linguistic support for the tripartite model of ecological image construction[9-10].

Table 1. High-Frequency Vocabulary in Qinghai's Ecological Policy Discourse

Rank	Part of Speech	Lexeme	Frequency	Semantic Category	Corresponding Image Type
1	Noun	Ecology	2456	Ecological Value Term	Culturally Driven
2	Verb	Protect	979	Behavioral Term	Institutional / Participatory
3	Verb	Construct	1113	Pathway Term	Institutional
4	Noun	Institution	310	Governance Structure Term	Institutional
5	Adj.	Green	568	Emotional Term	Culturally Driven

3.Conscience Principle: Ecological Ethics Collocations

The principle of conscience emphasizes the moral legitimacy of ecological awareness. The government shapes citizens' sense of environmental responsibility through moralizing discourse. To explore this, the study extracted high-frequency collocations such as "ecological + value" and "awareness + civilization." Despite variations in their Likelihood and Effect values, both collocations exhibit strong co-occurrence and

semantic function, serving as core expressions of ecological ethics in policy discourse.

For instance, the collocation "ecological + value" (Likelihood: 121.868, Effect: 2.727) frequently appears in phrases such as "ecological civilization," "social culture," and so on, indicating a transformation from conceptual recognition to shared societal value. Example:

"We must promote the era's concept of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature, guiding the entire society to establish

ecological ethics and morality based on ecological values."

Here, ecological values are tightly linked with ecological ethics, extending beyond governance frameworks to form the foundation of cultural identity. This illustrates how conscience-driven ethics underpin the legitimacy of both institutional and cultural ecological imagery.

Table 2. Representative Collocations – Conscience Principle

Collocation	Likelihood	Effect	Semantic Function	Image Type
Ecological + Value	121.868	2.727	Value-Oriented	Institutional / Culturally Driven
Consciousness + Civilization	52.075	4.545	Value-Oriented	Culturally Driven

4.Proximity Principle: Emotional Resonance Collocations

The principle of proximity reflects the emotional structure of human-nature relations. Through emotionally charged expressions and personification, policy discourse reduces psychological distance, enhancing public ecological identification. Representative collocations include "ecological + civilization" (Likelihood: 728.546, Effect: 3.141) and "development + green" (Likelihood: 154.146, Effect: 2.235).

For example:

"Make the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau a national and even international highland of ecological civilization."

The phrase "ecological highland" transforms geographic features into ecological symbols, instilling public pride and responsibility. Similarly, "development + green" appears in policy phrases like "green development" and "green transformation," reinforcing values of sustainability. These emotionally resonant expressions facilitate a shared sense of ecological culture and collective aspiration.

Table 3. Representative Collocations – Constraint Principle

Collocation	Likelihood	Effect	Semantic Function	Image Type
Governance + System	92.258	2.447	Structural Regulation	Institutional
Pollution + Control	649.404	5.172	Behavioral Norm	Institutional / Participatory

5.Constraint Principle: Institutional Normative Collocations

The constraint principle emphasizes behavioral regulation through policy and legal frameworks. Typical collocations include "governance + system" (Likelihood: 92.258, Effect: 2.447) and "pollution + control" (Likelihood: 649.404, Effect: 5.172).

For instance:

"Promote the modernization of environmental governance systems and build a multi-level, all-encompassing ecological supervision network."

This statement reflects the transformation of ecological governance approaches in Qinghai Province, indicating that the government no longer relies solely on fragmented local management but

is shifting toward a more unified and systematic regulatory model.

Another example:

"In addition to improving governance systems, the government strengthens pollution control measures and encourages public participation in supervision and enforcement."

These expressions reflect strong institutional orientation and implementation mechanisms, constructing an authoritative ecological image that also invites participatory governance. Constraint-driven language provides both the legitimacy and operational structure for institutional and participatory ecological discourse.

Table 4. Representative Collocations – Proximity Principle

Collocation	Likelihood	Effect	Semantic Function	Image Type
Ecological + Civilization	728.546	3.141	Imagery Construction	Cultural / Participatory
Development + Green	154.146	2.235	Emotive Imagery	Culturally Driven

6.Triple Discourse Construction Analysis

Under the synergistic guidance of the three principles of harmonious discourse—conscience, proximity, and constraint—Qinghai's ecological discourse gradually constructs an ecological image characterized by cultural recognition, institutional authority, and public participation. These three dimensions not only reflect political legitimacy and cultural justification but also represent the projection of ecological governance concepts in linguistic practice.

7.Culturally Driven Image

The culturally driven ecological image does more than disseminate ecological ideas; it leverages cultural symbols and emotional resonance to foster public ecological identity and behavioral motivation. Expressions like "ecological civilization" and "green development" function as cultural signifiers unique to Qinghai, conveying localized ecological values that mobilize community participation.

For instance, the policy statement "Develop Qinghai's unique ecological culture by transforming ecological understanding into ecological theory" emphasizes the transformation of practical experiences into collective knowledge. By embedding ecological protection into theoretical and cultural frameworks, this approach enhances public identity and shared responsibility.

Moreover, "Ecological civilization must be integrated into the social cultural system, enhancing environmental awareness and embedding ecological values as a shared societal norm" shows that ecological discourse in Qinghai extends beyond local governance, acquiring national and even international narrative power. This aligns with the conscience principle's emphasis on ecological ethics, and the proximity principle's appeal to emotional and cultural resonance.

8.Institutionally Authoritative Image

The institutionally authoritative ecological image is rooted in policy norms and institutional design, presenting an ecosystem governance model

characterized by executive power and regulatory enforcement. In Qinghai's discourse, this image is constructed through formal policy language, government-led frameworks, and implementation strategies.

For example, the phrase "Designing a top-level ecological civilization system in line with national standards and Qinghai's unique characteristics" highlights the integration of local governance with national ecological strategy. The metaphor "four beams and eight pillars" evokes a sense of systematic authority and structural completeness, reinforcing policy legitimacy.

Another typical expression is "The overall improvement of the province's ecological environment aligns with the goal of building a moderately prosperous society," which associates environmental progress with national development milestones. This linkage underlines the legitimacy of ecological discourse within the state policy narrative.

Such language constructs a state-centered ecological governance framework where institutions, regulations, and performance metrics are central. This aligns with the constraint principle of harmonious discourse, emphasizing order, accountability, and implementation capacity.

9.Publicly Participatory Image

The publicly participatory ecological image emphasizes the collaborative roles of multiple stakeholders in ecological governance. By employing normative and motivational discourse, this image fosters public ecological awareness and encourages societal engagement, extending ecological construction beyond government-led initiatives to inclusive community-driven efforts.

For instance, the policy text "Governments at all levels must shoulder political responsibility for ecological civilization, with coordinated efforts among departments and strict accountability mechanisms" signals a shift from vertical governance to collective action. Phrases like "joint responsibility" and "inter-agency coordination" highlight the shared nature of ecological responsibility.

Another example, "Strengthen integrated urban-rural environmental governance and enhance ecological monitoring, enforcement, and accountability systems," underscores the role of communities, social organizations, and individuals. These expressions mark a discursive transition from top-down mandates to participatory consensus-building.

This participatory framework not only embodies the normativity and sense of responsibility emphasized by the principle of constraint, ensuring that ecological behaviors are supported by institutional frameworks and guided by clear behavioral directives, it also aligns with the emotional identification and psychological ownership highlighted by the principle of proximity.

The threefold positioning of Qinghai's ecological image is not mutually isolated but rather nested and mutually reinforcing in discursive practice: the culture-driven dimension promotes the cultural dissemination and emotional identification of the local ecological image; the institutional-authority dimension ensures the political legitimacy and enforcement rigidity of

ecological discourse; and the public-participation dimension drives the social consensus and operationalization of ecological concepts. Together, these three dimensions constitute a regional ecological communication framework with cultural penetrability, discursive systematicity, and social mobilization capacity.

10.Conclusion

Based on the theory of harmonious discourse, this paper identifies three discourse construction paths—culturally driven, institutionally authoritative, and publicly participatory—in Qinghai's ecological policy discourse. These paths reflect how government discourse integrates cultural recognition, political legitimacy, and public mobilization to construct a multidimensional ecological communication framework. This reveals that Qinghai's ecological narrative is not only grounded in policy enforcement but also in cultural ethics and collective identity, thereby reinforcing social acceptance and ecological commitment.

The study proposes an analytical framework built on the three principles of harmonious discourse—conscience, proximity, and constraint—offering a normative and ethical lens for understanding ecological language in local governance. This contributes to the theoretical localization of ecolinguistics and enriches the empirical basis of regional ecological discourse research.

Additionally, the research findings hold enlightening significance for promoting the ecological transformation of government language. Against the backdrop of the nation's advancement in building an ecological civilization institutional system, enhancing the ethical dimensions and humanistic warmth of policy discourse represents a crucial pathway to realizing the vision of green development. Future research could further introduce multimodal analysis methods to explore the characteristics of ecological discourse in communication carriers such as graphics, texts, and videos, thereby providing theoretical support for the multimodal application of harmonious discourse theory.

However, this study is limited to official policy texts and does not include other discourse sources such as media coverage or social media interactions. Future research could expand to multimodal discourses and investigate multi-agent ecological image construction and interaction dynamics, thus supporting broader cross-cultural ecolinguistics applications.

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