

Chinese Ecological Discourse Construction in CBD COP15

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Abstract. In this century, under the guidance of the basic state policy of conserving resources and the environment, China has made the rich practical experience and great historic achievements in the construction of ecological civilization, but the deployment of China's ecological communication system is relatively late, and the international ecological discourse system is also imperfect. This paper combs the discipline context and development status of ecological communication. Taking the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity held in Kunming, China, in 2021 as an example, four mainstream Chinese media are selected for analysis, aiming at exploring the inherent law of the ecological communication and excavating the international discourse system of ecological civilization with Chinese characteristics.

Keywords: Ecological Communication; COP15; Discourse Construction

1. Introduction

As early as the end of the 19th century, some scientists had realized that the greenhouse effect produced by human economic activities was enough to cause global warming. However, the concern and early warning of natural ecology, environment, and climate have not attracted enough attention for a long time. Over the past 120 years, resource constraints have been tightening, environmental pollution has been serious, ecosystems have been degraded, and influenza viruses have been rampant. "Revenge of Nature" awakens human beings to realize that changes and deterioration in the ecological environment are an ongoing reality. In August 2021, the Sixth Assessment Report of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reiterated in the most definitive terms: "It is clear that human impacts have caused warming of the atmosphere, oceans and land." Anthropogenic climate change has begun to affect extreme weather and climate events worldwide

In the past 10 years, under the guidance of the basic state policy of conserving resources and the environment, China's ecological environment protection has been fully integrated into the overall situation of economic and social development, and "Chinese wisdom" has been pouring into the process of ecological civilization construction in the world. In 2012, the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) announced that ecological civilization construction should be juxtaposed with economic, political, cultural and social construction. The five-sphere integrated plan of socialism with Chinese characteristics shows that the CPC has raised the ecological environment protection to the strategic height of the national will. In 2013, the Governing Council of the UN Environment Program adopted a draft decision to promote the concept of "China's Ecological Civilization". In 2017, the Nineteenth National Congress of the CPC report first put forward the concept of "Socialist Ecological Civilization" to promote the construction of ecological civilization to "the millennium plan for the sustainable development of the Chinese nation". In 2021, the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP15), the first global conference of the UN on the theme of ecological civilization, was held in Kunming, Southwest China's Yunnan Province, which became a key node for China to play a leading role in the reversion of biodiversity loss trend and the implementation of the global biodiversity framework after 2020.

The theme of CBD COP15 is "Ecological Civilization: Building a Shared Future for All Life on Earth", which aims to promote the construction of global ecological civilization. CBD COP15 emphasizes that humans and nature are the community of life, so we should respect for, conform to and protect nature to achieve the sustainable use and benefit-sharing of biodiversity by 2050. As the

host and chairman of CBD COP15, China can play a leading role in reforming the wildlife management system and establishing a positive model image to realize the beautiful vision of "harmonious coexistence between man and nature". Meanwhile, China will actively promote ecological civilization and green development, and "go out" to provide more countries with models and experiences for reference.

How to excavate the unique Chinese story, promote the national ecological civilization concepts to go overseas, and convey the "strongest voice" of China's ecological protection to the world, the media's propaganda and follow-up reports in the field of ecological environment are important. In particular, unlike general international conferences, with the approval of the State Council, CBD COP15 is held in two stages - the first is in October 2021, and the second is in the third quarter of 2022. Staged meetings also put forward higher requirements for the China's media not only to report intensively during the meeting but also to continuously transmit the Chinese story of biodiversity conservation during the interval between the two stages, even for a longer period before and after the meeting, which has become a hot topic in space, nationwide coverage and daily time, and simultaneously carried out external dissemination.

As a branch of communication, ecological communication integrates ecology and communication disciplines and constantly intersects with the economy, sci-tech and international communication, which has become a new academic hotspot reflecting the changes in the industry. In practice, ecological communication has covered all aspects of Lasswell's "Three Functions of Communication". First, ecological communication has the function of environmental monitoring, that is, the new changes in the natural environment should be constantly updated to human society. Second, ecological communication has the function of social contact and coordination, which can contact, coordinate and unify government departments, enterprises, scientific research institutions, the public and other social components related to the ecological environment, and work together to adapt to and improve the environment. Finally, ecological communication also has the function of social heritage transmission, which has an important mechanism to ensure the transmission of social heritage from generation to generation, as is the communication initiative to protect natural resources for future generations.

Therefore, with the rich practical experience and great historical achievements in the construction of ecological civilization in China, the study of environmental issues represented by CBD COP15 has both theoretical importance for communication development and practical significance for the current construction of ecological civilization.

2. Literature review

Ecology started in the 1960s when the environmental crisis triggered widespread criticism of modern industrial society. The popular science book *Silent Spring* (Rachel Carson, 1962) presented readers with a thorough picture of the ecological impact of modern pollution, challenged agricultural scientists and government policies, and called for a rapid change in people's views of nature. *Only One Earth: The Care and Maintenance of a Small Planet* (1972), an unofficial report of the UN, warned that uncontrolled exploitation would accelerate the depletion of the Earth's mineral resources. The textbook *Environmental Ecology* (Foer de Man, 1987) described the impacts of various environmental pressures on the structure and function of ecosystems, such as air pollution, toxic elements, acidification, forest loss, oil pollution, and water eutrophication and pesticides. The publication of the textbook marked the basic formation of the theoretical framework of environmental ecology. As a result, the ecological discipline system has been gradually established due to the opening of the ecological thought trend. In the 1970s-1980s, the theory of this discipline developed rapidly because of the emergence of a large number of new ideas of ecologism.

With the rise of ecologism, the ecological movement broke out in the world. The combination of the ecological movement and mass media has made the importance of "ecological communication" reach a global consensus. As a result, ecological communication research has developed (Chen

Zhaohui, 2014). Previously, the humanities and social sciences, including sociology and communication, paid little attention to ecological disciplines until the publication of *Ecological Communication*. The concept of "environmental communication" is defined as "any communication practice and way of expressing environmental issues", and the essence of ecological communication is regarded as a communication practice and way of action acting on the structure of "changing the social communication structure and discourse system" (Nicholas Luhmann, 1989). Thereafter, interdisciplinary people focus on ecology, sociology, communication and human beings begin to pay attention to and explain the relationship between human social behaviour and the natural environment from the perspective of ecological communication.

In China, as a branch of mass communication, the practice of ecological communication by media workers began in the 1970s and matured in the 1990s (Mou Junhan, 2012). Compared with the West, the overall development is relatively late. The research related to ecological communication began in the 1990s, with Li Liang's (1994) thoughts on Environmental News as the most representative. Looking at the current situation in China, the main research issue is about the function, value and practice of ecological communication (Chen Zhaohui, 2014).

Nowadays, the academic circles generally believe that ecological communication refers to the information dissemination activities directly or indirectly related to humans and ecology, which is not only an important part of ecological civilization but also a booster of ecological civilization construction (Tie Zheng, 2007). According to the broad and narrow definition of mass communication, ecological communication also has a corresponding distinction, which refers to all ecological information dissemination activities in a broad sense. While in a narrow sense, it refers to the activities through mass media (Huang Xingmin, 1999), which also is used in this paper.

Over the past two decades, the international community has paid more and more attention to the dramatic changes in the ecological environment, which has led to the rapid development of ecological communication. Among them, the most significant contribution to the discipline has been made by relevant events and conferences in the past 10 years, including COP15 UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in 2010, Climate Conference in Paris in 2015 and CBD COP15 in Kunming in 2021 (Wan Xialin, Zou Yueyu, Wang Qilu, 2020). Among them, China's media have different characteristics in the objectives, framework and content of ecological issues reporting, which can provide insight into the transformation process and the real form of the ecological discourse construction communication.

During the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference, the government was the main constructor of China's ecological discourse, while the media was the auxiliary transmitter, so the public was greatly influenced by both and was often at the level of passive responders. In the dissemination of content, the government discourse mostly took the establishment of a good national image as the starting point, and enriched China's ecological discourse through the network media, with strong political colour. The problems exposed are also more prominent. For example, the lack of sustainability has become a soft threat to communication, and the time distribution of ecological discourse also reflects a serious imbalance. (Zhao Qing, 2011)

During the first stage of COP15, the communication pattern has changed significantly. Firstly, the local provincial and municipal media in Yunnan took advantage of major events to mobilize the power of all-media acquisition and editing, by inviting many stars to voice, producing high-quality trailers, popularizing local ecological protection policies, carrying out essay solicitation activities, poster activities, etc., to publicize the image of the city and urban IP to the outside world, which had remarkable dissemination effect (Yao Hong et al., 2021). Secondly, in terms of international communication, 123 Chinese and foreign media carried out on-site reports and interviews, including two Hong Kong media such as Phoenix New Media and South China Morning Post, as well as six foreign media in China such as Reuters, Agence France-Presse, Radio France Internationale, Swedish Television, Singapore Straits Times and Asian News Channel. Meanwhile, 56 journalists from 46 foreign media attended the meeting online, including Agence France-Presse, Associated Press, BBC, Bloomberg, Guardian, Deutsche Presse and Kyodo News Agency. Thirdly, the content of the

mainstream media in China was more splendid and richer, with People's Daily publishing more than 30 heavy reports, Xinhua News Agency and its sub-network creating and forwarding more than 7,000 related reports, and CCTV.com application publishing articles in high density for six consecutive days. For instance, on October 12 alone, more than 20 related articles were published by CCTV.com, and the clicks on the relative topics were more than 100,000.

By comparison, it can be seen that in the past ten years, whether in connotation or extension, the ecological communication by China's media is broader than before. For example, content focuses more on the prominent contradictions or symbiosis between human beings and the environment. In terms of means of communication, it also extends to video, posters, H5 interaction and other forms.

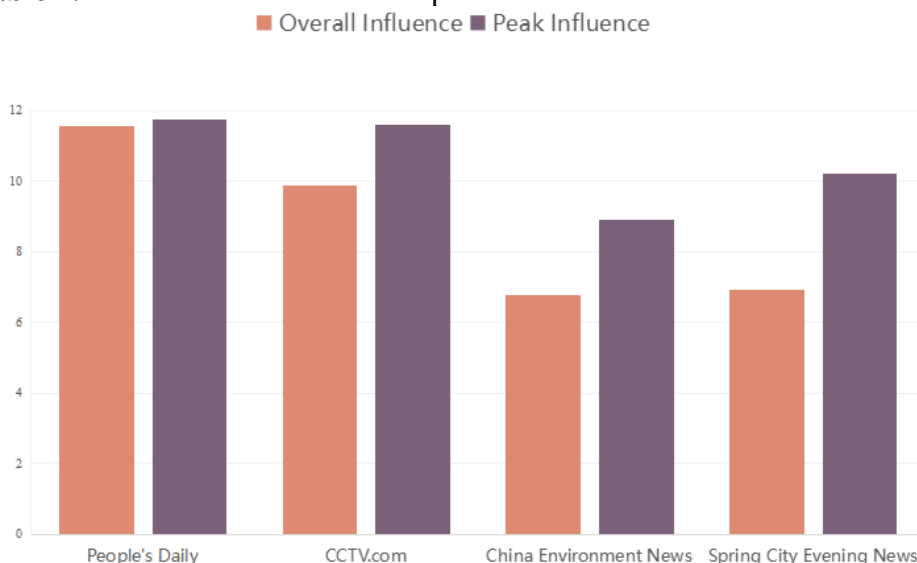
But at present, China's ecological communication has not received enough attention from the academic frontier research. As far as "ecological communication" and "environmental communication" are concerned, the definitions of the two are generally close and confused in academic circles. In addition, most of the current research on ecological communication focuses on function, value, and practice. However, little attention is paid to the connotation, characteristics, principles, rules, strategies and effects (Chen Zhaohui, 2014). More importantly, ecological communication has the significance of transcending national boundaries and forming a global communication matrix. Therefore, based on the conference on the ecological environment, we should pay more attention to the reporting framework and research system of ecological communication in China. It can not only study the characteristics and laws of ecological communication from the micro-level, but also construct the international discourse power of China's ecological civilization from the macro level, and then provide a communication development path suitable for China's ecological protection and communication undertakings at home and abroad.

To this end, this paper takes CBD COP15, an international conference on global biodiversity conservation held in Kunming, China in the past two years, as the main focus, and studies the reports of the mainstream media at the central, provincial and municipal levels in China, to achieve accurate communication, open up mass communication, breakthrough international communication, and explore the inherent law of ecological communication. Only in this way will the international discourse construction of China's ecological civilization have innovative reference significance for sustainable research in academia and continuous reporting in the news industry.

3. Case Study of Ecological Reporting of China's Mainstream Media

3.1 Differences in Communication Impact

Table 1. Whole Communication Impact of Four China's Mainstream Media



At present, the mainstream media of deep developing ecological communication include comprehensive media and environmental protection media. This paper samples four media, including two central mainstream media "People's Daily" and "CCTV.com", one central professional media "China Environment News" and one municipal mainstream media "Spring City Evening News". The paper also collects the articles of four media WeChat official accounts and applications from May 21 to November 18, 2021, in the first stage of CBD COP15 intensive ecological reporting interval, and calculates the performance of different media in the reporting through the article dissemination data, as shown in Table 1.

The calculation method is as follows: firstly, the total number of reading (R), the number of wowing (Z), the number of likes (L), and the highest number of reading (Rmax), the highest number of likes (Zmax), and the days (d) included in the evaluation period are collected from the same media ecological reporting; then, the daily average reading number (R/d), the daily average reading number (Z/d), and the daily average number of likes (L/d) are calculated; finally, by the formulas,

$$\text{the overall influence (O)} = 0.85 * \ln(R/d + 1) + 0.09 * \ln(Z/d * 10 + 1) + 0.06 * \ln(L/d * 10 + 1)$$

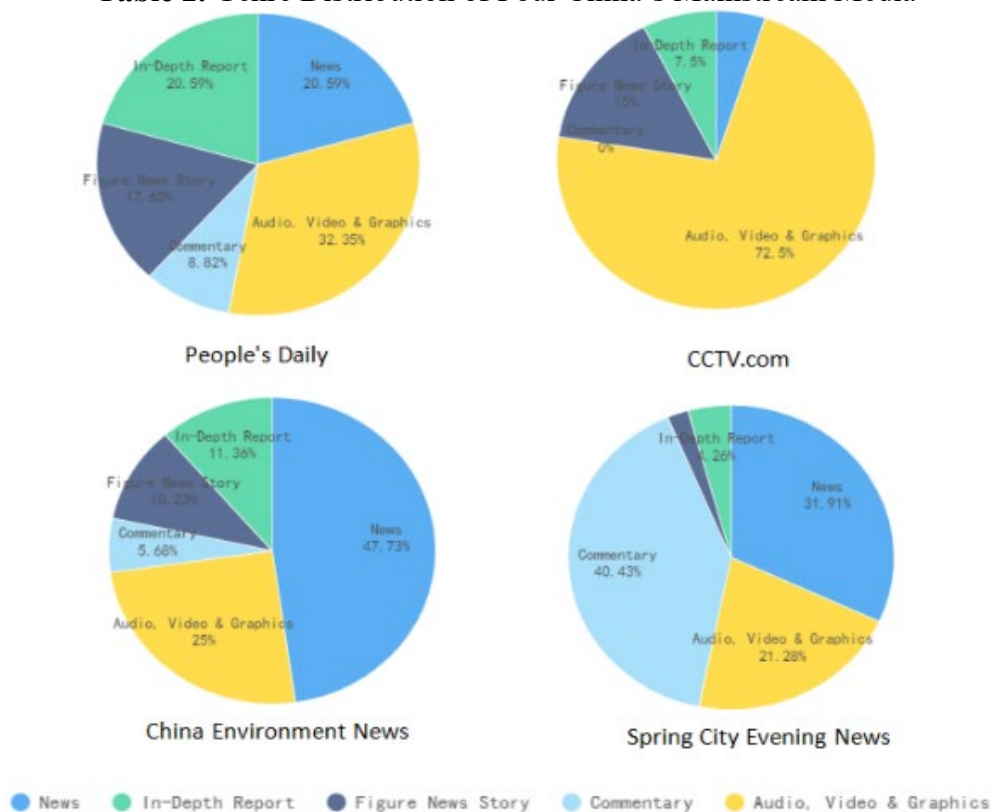
$$\text{the peak influence (P)} = 0.85 * \ln(R_{max} + 1) + 0.09 * \ln(Z_{max} * 10 + 1) + 0.06 * \ln(L_{max} * 10 + 1)$$

are calculated. From the figure, the overall and the peak influence of "People's Daily" and "CCTV.com" are higher than those of the other two, and "Spring City Evening News" also shows tenacious expression.

3.2 Differences in Genre Distribution

Genre type is one of the important factors affecting communication impact. The genre distribution of CBD COP15 reported by four mainstream media is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Genre Distribution of Four China’s Mainstream Media



Among them, the genre category selection of "People's Daily" tends to be balanced, while "CCTV.com" gives full play to the advantages of audio-visual media. "China Environment News" has far more news than other media, but because of the single topic, it is at a relative disadvantage in the competition with other comprehensive media. "Spring City Evening News" has many

commentary articles, which are closely related to people's livelihood, with diverse topics and sticky audiences.

3.3 Content analysis of Ecological Reporting

In terms of content, "China Environment News" focuses on environmental protection policies, calls and cases. While conveying political views on the construction of ecological civilization, it objectively reflects a wide range of opinions in society and reflects the relationship between China's economic development and the ecological construction in all aspects. In addition, through charts, cartoons, photographs, background materials and other forms, "China Environment News" sets the innovative topic selection to cover laws and regulations, discipline construction, ecological species, foreign cases, green products, etc., especially making good use of celebrity effect. For instance, the article *Many stars voice for COP15: Our Future Is in Action at This Moment* releases posters of four Wild Aid public welfare ambassadors, with a single page view of 10 times the daily average. In the star propaganda drainage, the comprehensive media also has great power. "People's Daily" releases the singer Zhou Shen's MV, with a page view of more than 100,000.

"China Environment News" is also good at digging interesting and people-friendly content, such as the article *Through Morchella, China's Biological Resources Utilization and Sustainable Development Achievements*, which reflects the effectiveness of environmental protection policies through food. Generally speaking, the number of articles published by its WeChat official account is less than 600 words, and comments are often used to interpret environmental instant news professionally, like the article *What the post-90s "Beaver Princess" said at the COP15 main venue*, which not only demonstrates the ecological protection attitude of Generation Z but also plays the role of information broadcasting and opinion advocacy in the way of the official evaluation.

The central mainstream media including "People's Daily" and "CCTV.com" integrate the advantages of international communication and pay more attention to the proposals and cooperation of various countries. In December 2021, there were 106 pieces of related news on "CCTV.com", including the conference process, speeches, policy proposals, hot spots and interviews with typical figures.

"People's Daily" also uses a lot of rhetorical devices in its reports, such as personification in *Panda's Secret Journey* and analogy in *President Xi's Five-Point Proposal at the G20 Summit*. The articles on policy explanation represented by the latter are longer, all of which use the construction of the earth's home of harmonious coexistence between man and nature, coordinated economic and environmental development, jointly opening a new journey of human's high-quality development, the remarkable achievements of China's ecological civilization construction as the main body.

3.4 Differences in News Planning

Compared with the central mainstream media, the local media in Yunnan, the host of CBD COP15, tend to report more daily and geographical-close content, including why COP15 chose Kunming, what preparations Kunming has made, and what effectiveness of biodiversity conservation in Kunming. The language of "Spring City Evening News" is also plain and interactive in various forms, including essay contests, poetry recitation, song interpretation, and so on.

As early as November 2020, Kunming Newspaper Media Group made full use of the advantages of the local platforms, carefully planned and deployed the series of topics, and strived to build the spiritual outlook of the whole citizens. For example, in June 2021, the short video contest on the theme of *Spring City Covenant-COP15 I Know and I Participate in Ecological Civilization* collected 1,500 groups of entries, with a total of more than 30 million views.

In addition, Kunming Newspaper Media Group launched major news products at important nodes such as on the 100-day & 30-day countdown and the opening day, with three-dimensional and diversified visual and interactive products, and communication channels covering the whole country. For example, in the countdown of one week, the planning topics were launched intensively. "Kunming Daily" produced a series of pictures of *COP15 City Tour*, as well as posters of

Encyclopedia Illustrated Manual and H5 articles of *Ecological Diversity Scratch*^[1]. These initiatives not only introduce the rich and diverse species and ecology of Yunnan to the whole country but also keep the hot news for COP15. On the other hand, it also promotes the construction of tourist attractions in Yunnan Province and improves the national popularity of Yunnan.

4. Challenges of Ecological Reporting of China's Mainstream Media

4.1 Single Subject of Discourse Construction

From the perspective of communication subject, government agencies are the primary subject of ecological discourse construction. During the first stage of CBD COP15, no matter how the form of media communication changes, its content mostly revolves around the government and scientific research institutions, through the promotion of ecological policies and knowledge, to guide the public's views and attitudes. Thus, in general, the government, mainstream media and the public jointly promote the evolution and development of domestic ecological issues, but the nature of the meeting, the agenda-setting and the interpretation of environmental issues are all decided by the government^[2]. If enriching the discourse construction subjects such as celebrity ecologists and folk species protectors, and achieving effective communication between the callers and the public, the media will play a greater role in guiding ecological public opinion.

4.2 Imbalance of Media Forms

From the perspective of communication mode, the forms adopted by different media are multiple and complimentary, but the proportion is not balanced, and the combination form is single. The deep integration of media forms and reporting content is the future direction that can be improved.

4.3 Lack of Temporal Continuity

From the perspective of time distribution, the ecological communication of China's mainstream media mainly relies on a certain event to carry out centralized communication, lacking sustainability. The paper finds that in October 2021, when the first stage of CBD COP15 was held, the ecological communication of the mainstream media was strong, while in the 2-3 months before and after it, the coverage of the corresponding issues dropped sharply. At present, to construct the international discourse power of ecological civilization, China must turn ecological communication into a routine issue setting of the media and break the uneven distribution in the cycle.

4.4 Localization of Ecological Communication

From the perspective of communication objects, the current stage of ecological communication is more inclined toward local, lack of international communication of introducing other countries' practices and issuing external reports. Media discourse should properly listen to international voices, both "bringing in" and "going out", knowing each other in the field of international public opinion.

5. Suggestions for Ecological Reporting of China's Mainstream Media

5.1 Spreading Reporting Pattern in an All-Round Way

To construct China's ecological discourse and spread the reporting pattern in an all-around way, China's mainstream media need to improve in the aspects of media form, reporting topics, genre form and time frequency.

In terms of media forms, increasing the proportion of pictures and videos through visual impact can strengthen the multi-media cooperation with entertainment variety, radio podcasts, learning websites, video animation and other media platforms, further expand the influence of ecological reporting, and create the normalization of ecological reporting.

In terms of reporting topics, first, the media should form a scale effect and publish reports on related topics on a large scale. Second, they should take the people as the centre, pay attention to practical problems and win the readers' psychological identity and proximity. Finally, the reporting should value the timelines and open up the information source to quickly obtain first-hand news.

In terms of genre forms, the reporting genre should be pluralistic and balanced to break the inherent preference of the media itself. At the same time, genre integration can break through the stereotype of ecological communication and make full use of innovation and vitality.

Due to the concentrated release time of ecological reports, there is a transmission fault, and public participation is insufficient. A general audience is a huge group, which has a natural willingness to participate in ecological issues and discourse space, so the media can let the public participate in the process of daily ecological communication. In this way, not only ecological knowledge and ideas have been popularized, but also ecological reports have become a normal topic, and the power of public opinion can help solve ecological problems in international affairs.^[3]

5.2 Localized Reporting in a Solid but Interesting Way

How to make ecological communication localized, novel, and even create local IP, the media at all levels throughout the country should adjust measures to local conditions, form a talented echelon and planning issues, especially in charge of ecological reporting, and carry out both positive propaganda and negative exposure.

On the one hand, it is necessary to make ecological reporting be a regular topic for mainstream media at all levels, give full play to the media's functions of public opinion guidance and supervision, zero tolerance for local ecological problems, and speed up the rectification of acts that damage the ecological environment by exposing reports, to form a good atmosphere of public opinion for ecological protection in the whole society. On the other hand, the media should play a positive role in guiding and encouraging propaganda by promoting the measures and results of local ecological improvement, excavating interesting Chinese stories and creating a brand of ecological environment protection and communication with local characteristics.

Local characteristic communication can also be achieved through joint reporting in many places. Local media can be separated across regional spaces and break through the barriers of media cooperation in ecological communication, such as the report *Getting Rid of Poverty and Joining Hands with a Well-Off Society*, an all-media joint interview of Ningbo Daily and Southwest Guizhou Daily, which breaks the limitation of time and space, as well as the restriction of communication channel and identity to make the media cooperation and institutional advantages more effective. Cross-regional cooperation can form a highly unified media synergy and promote the media cooperation of Southwest Guizhou Daily and Ningbo Daily to another height.^[4]

5.3 Building Ecological Communication Pattern in an International Way

As a new opportunity for China's ecological environment protection to "go out", media workers should grasp the good opportunity brought by the two stages of CBD COP15 to tell China's ecological stories. Especially in the face of the strong position and false reports contrary to the "objectivity and impartiality" of Western media in international communication, the media must judge overseas public opinion and change the communication mode to build an effective Chinese discourse system by competing for the right to speak in international public opinion.^[5] To this end, the paper summarizes several key points.

Firstly, in international communication, the media should strengthen their theoretical, institutional and cultural self-confidence, maintain an optimistic attitude towards China's ecological environment construction, and keep neither humble nor arrogant at all times. Secondly, the media should improve narrative methods and expression skills, skillfully use international social media platforms, globalize the study of ecological communication, and explore the successful experience in global communication. Finally, the international communication of ecological civilization should change from mass communication to precise communication. Chinese media should dare to innovate and

breakthrough, focus on content and form innovation, strive for more opportunities to express China's position and views, and wholeheartedly explore the Chinese discourse of ecological civilization and its international communication significance.

6. Conclusion

At the present stage, the construction of the international discourse system of China's ecological civilization is not yet mature with certain shortcomings, such as uneven frequency of reports, single media resources and fixed forms and genres. However, it can be seen that the media from the central, provincial and municipal to county levels are strengthening the strategic deployment and implementation of the ecological communication pattern. Relying on the major international ecological events focusing on China, Chinese media should continue to explore the path of ecological discourse with Chinese characteristics and international perspective as soon as possible, and accelerate the global construction of a new pattern of Chinese ecological communication.

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