



# A Critical Discourse Analysis of Visual Frame Metonymy of Chinese Environment Day Posters

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## Abstract

This study is conducted to elucidate the mechanism of visual frame metonymy in Chinese environmental governance posters and discloses their functions in environmental governance issues. The study takes 142 posters advertised on Environment Day in 2023 as a corpus. It first identifies and describes what scenes are metonymically referred to by the visual elements in the posters. It then explores the mechanism of visual frame metonymy from a critical discourse perspective and finally evaluates its functions. The study reveals that the posters predominantly construct visual frames of mountain-river landscapes, city-townscape, human actions, ecological reserves, rare species, new technology projects, and national cultural heritages. The frames invoked by specific visual semiotics underscore the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature. The mechanism of visual metonymy employed in the posters offers an insight into understanding what nature is and what harmonious coexistence is. Furthermore, the study considers the function of visual frames in affecting public attitudes and behaviours in daily life. It concludes that the discursive practice of the “Two Mountains” concept of environment governance, which draws upon the traditional Chinese landscape philosophy, evokes emotional resonance among the public and stimulates their imagination of what harmonious coexistence is. This, in turn, can motivate their environmental protection actions.

## Keywords

Environmental governance; visual frame metonymy; visual discourse criticism; harmonious coexistence

## 1. Introduction

Harmonious coexistence is a core concept and goal of environmental governance in China. It is the guiding principle in “the governance of all environmental resources from conventional renewable and non-renewable natural resources to biodiversity and atmospheric sinks, as well as to environmental safety and the quality of air and water” (Paavola, 2006, p. 94). To achieve this goal, a range of policies and guidelines have been developed, in which Environment Day posters are one of the governance pathways.

Environment Day poster is a type of visual discourse within environmental communication, which is “the pragmatic and constitutive vehicle for our understanding of the environment as well as our relationship to the natural world; it is the symbolic medium that we use in constructing environmental problems and negotiating society’s different responses to them” (Cox, 2010, p. 20). Therefore, it matters how the environment is framed [visually] (Lakoff, 2010). In this study, a frame is understood as a cognitive knowledge structure, and a visual frame is constructed by visualising concepts, patterns, and modes (Liu, 2021, p. 278). It is coded through visual discourse strategies to activate established cognitive schemas. It shapes the way we see the world and the goals we pursue (Lakoff, 2013, p. 4). Its

function is thus to anchor and constrain people's cognitive styles (Liu, 2021, p. 278).

Some of the visual studies have already been dedicated to exploring the communication features of the environment. For instance, Hidalgo-Downing and O'Dowd (2023) explore 51 noncommercial environmental advertisements from conceptual metaphor theory. Their study revealed that half of the corpus frames environmental themes through source domains such as weapons, predators, and natural disasters. The results show that those advertisements tend to foreground the "environmental crisis" to attract the public's attention and take action. O'Dowd (2024) studies the effect of the creative use of metonymy in digital banners for the global climate strike movement. Dancygier's (2023) study focuses on frame metonymy. Frame metonymy is a concept related to the study of metonymy (Dancygier, 2011; Dancygier, 2023). Using the concept of frame metonymy and blending, Dancygier (2023) investigates some pervasive visual frames of environmental issues, such as "save the planet" and "hourglass". Her study discusses how climate change is framed in such a way as to evoke the public's participation in protecting the environment. Those studies reveal that the visual rhetoric purpose in environmental communication is to construct a "crisis", where human beings and nature are placed in a binary relationship.

The principle of environmental governance in China is "harmonious coexistence between human beings and nature". The Environment Day poster is a medium used to transmit the idea. According to Li (2022), the poster is a type of "semiotic governance", selecting and composing visual elements with rhetorical strategies to persuade the audience.

Given the above, this study takes the Environment Day posters exhibited by the Ministry of Ecology and Environment of the People's Republic of China in 2023 as a research corpus. The purpose is to conduct a critical discourse study on the visual rhetoric used in the posters. The study uses the concept of visual frame metonymy within cognitive theory to code the visual semiotic resources in the posters and then explains and evaluates the visual frames. Thus, the research questions of the present study are:

- (1) What types of visual frames are constructed in the posters?
- (2) What are the properties of the visual frames metonymy, and what are the factors that affect the choice of the visual elements?
- (3) What are the values of the visual frames used in the Environment Day posters?

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Visual Frame, Visual Frame Metonymy

A visual frame is instantiated from a visual cognitive system, which visually constructs, displays, and contests a specific discourse (Liu, 2021, p. 285). The same as the verbal frame, it is to "select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman, 1993, p. 52). It concerns the selection of visual elements in the media communication dedicated to reinforcing the cognitive schema (Geise, 2017, p. 1). Hence, the interpretation is related to cognition, just as what Lakoff (2013, p. 1) says, it belongs to the "cognitive unconscious" stage according to what cognitive scientists consider.

The pioneering work of expanding verbal frame analysis to visual frame analysis is Goffman (1979), whose work provides a new perspective on cognitive frame analysis, though he doesn't discuss the methodologies. Liu (2021) proposes a systemic model for visual frame analysis grounded on a systematic review of frame studies, which includes the cognitive visual frame model. Concerning how to identify visual frames, Liu (2021) considers that, though the concept frame varies in different academic fields, it is after all a kind of "cognitive schema" (Goffman, 1974). Thus, the interpretation needs to refer to the dimension of a cognitive model, which is termed an idealized cognitive model (ICM) (Lakoff, 1987), in which metonymy is one of the models. In cognitive visual frame analysis, visual metonymy is an important constituent element. The images are selected in the whole system, deployed, and eventually act as the role of "THE PART FOR THE WHOLE", to fully reveal the core issues (Liu, 2021, p. 293).

The recognition of metonymy is based on relatedness, that is, "using one entity to refer to another that is related to it" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 36). Lakoff (1987) further proposes ICM, clarifying the relationship between metonymy and human beings' cognition, knowledge, and experience. The concept of metonymy is further defined as that the source and the target occur in the same cognitive domain (Lakoff & Turner, 1999; Gibbs, 1994), which is considered "as a cognitive process in which one conceptual entity is mentally accessed via another entity" (Radden & Kövecses, 1999, p. 21). Thus, it is the same as metaphor, metonymy is also a conceptual system. That is, metonymy

can also occur in visual resources. Drawing on Halliday's (1987) social semiotic theory and visual grammar (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006), grounded on the three types of metonymy proposed by Radden and Kövecses (1999), Feng (2017) describes how sign metonymy, reference metonymy, and concept metonymy occur in visual discourse. However, Liu (2021) argues that in visual metonymy, the system of sign metonymy includes both referential and conceptual dimensions. He then proposes two types of visual metonymies, referential and conceptual metonymy. Referential metonymy is "THE PART FOR WHOLE", using relevant visual resources to reconstruct the real world, relating to temporal and special issues. For instance, using specific visual elements of a frame representing the entire frame is one of the types (Dancygier, 2011). Conceptual metonymy concerns "CONCRETE FOR ABSTRACT", deploying concrete visual elements representing an abstract concept. A visual element that has the function of representing an abstract concept is due to its property. Therefore, the two types of visual metonymies help to "see the things that would otherwise be difficult to present" and "understand meanings that would otherwise be hard to express". What's more, just as verbal metonymy, visual metonymy "allows us to focus more specifically on certain aspects of what is being referred to" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 33). "The choice of metonymic source makes salient, perspectivizes, and/or evaluates one or more aspects of the target that otherwise would not, or not as clearly, have been noticeable". And the "highlighted aspect often has an evaluative dimension" (Foceville, 2009, p. 69).

The visual frame metonymy, then, according to Dancygier (2023, p. 222), is using "a visually salient element of a frame to provide access to the frame as a whole and thus allow further emergence of meaning". Thus, it is related to the study of the types of metonymy. She further notes that "multimodal discourse overall depends on frame metonymy more than any other discourse genre" (Dancygier, 2023, p. 235).

Based on the definitions, the visual frames used in the Environment Day posters are investigated to explore the meanings and the functions in communicating harmonious coexistence.

## 2.2 The Criticism of Visual Frame Metonymy

Regarding "criticism", there has been a distinction between "strong" and "weak". More scholars understand it from the latter. Wodak (1999, p. 186) claims criticism "means distinguishing complexity and denying easy, dichotomous explanations. It means making contradictions transparent". Foss (2004, p. 6) points out that "criticism is a qualitative research method that involves the systematic analysis and examination of symbolic actions and artefacts". Hart and Daughton (2005) consider criticism as "the act of interpreting rhetoric's complexity and diversity through a comprehensive and effective reading and interpretation". Based on "weak criticism", Charteris-Black (2004) develops a model for critical metaphor analysis by borrowing Fairclough's (2001) three-dimensional model of discourse analysis. Li and Wang (2015) further develop a model for critical metonymy analysis. In the visual study field, van Leeuwen (2012), Machin (2013) extend the verbal critical discourse analysis to multimodal discourse, which has inspired some relevant studies, such as multimodal critical metonymy analysis (Pan, 2019). So far, the models for rhetoric or discourse criticism have developed into various types.

The present study applies "weak criticism". Each poster is considered a visual frame constructed through certain visual elements and activates certain meanings through visualization. The criticism thus is carried out by using the common procedures of three steps, description, explanation and evaluation to disclose the properties of the visual frames (Foss, 2004; Li & Wang, 2015). The step of description is to identify and describe the visual frames of the posters constructed by specific visual elements. The explanation step is to explore the meanings embraced in the posters. The relevant contextual factors and ideologies are also examined. The final step is to discuss the values of the visual frames.

## 3. Research Methods

The corpus for the study is the Environment Day posters in 2023 from the Ministry of Ecology and Environment. The theme is "building harmonious coexistence between humans and nature". The corpus includes 142 posters, which are all displayed on the website <https://www.mee.gov.cn/home/ztbd/2023/65hjr2023/>. All of those posters can be downloaded. The study first codes the visual elements of the posters based on the visual grammar proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006). Through a coding process, the visual frames are classified. Their proportions are counted. The study then explores the selection of visual metonymic elements and their ideological messages. Finally, the study examines the values of the visualization of harmonious coexistence and its effects. The study uses a combination of

quantitative and qualitative methods. The qualitative method is a systematic examination based on quantitative analysis.

According to the first step, the visual elements in the posters are coded. Grounded on the nature of referential metonymy as “THE PART FOR WHOLE”, the visual semiotic resources in each poster are coded. For instance, the poster in Figure 1 selects visual elements of the lake, two birds, wood, mountains, white fog, etc., as the resources. Their spatial layout constructs a frame in which two birds fly on the lake, with the wood and the mountain as background. The picture activates the audience to imagine the whole realistic scenario. Besides, the types of conceptual metonymy are identified by examining whether concrete visual elements are used to represent abstract concepts or multimodal complementarity. For instance, the image of a mountain or water metonymically represents the concept of nature. The image of flying birds metonymically represents life and freedom.

The classification of the 142 posters reveals that there are 9 types of visual frames. They are visual frames of mountain-river landscapes, city-townscape, human action, ecological reserves, rare species, new technology projects, future outlook, national cultural heritage, and ecological destruction. Table 1 shows the distribution of the visual frames. The visual frames of landscape and city-townscape occupy the highest proportion, with 21.8%. The visual frame of ecological destruction is the lowest, only 1.4%. Those frames constructed by the specific visual elements establish a cognitive channel, guiding the audience to understand the concept of harmonious coexistence and inviting public participation in environmental protection activities. Section 4 explores the meanings and the values of the visual frames.

**Table 1. The distribution of the visual frames of the Environment Day posters**

| Types of Visual Frames     | Number | Proportion |
|----------------------------|--------|------------|
| Mountain-river Landscapes  | 31     | 21.8%      |
| City-townscape             | 31     | 21.8%      |
| Human Actions              | 22     | 15.5%      |
| Ecological Reserves        | 18     | 12.7%      |
| New Technology Projects    | 12     | 8.5%       |
| Rare Species               | 14     | 9.9%       |
| Future Outlook             | 8      | 5.6%       |
| National Cultural Heritage | 5      | 3.5%       |
| Ecological Destruction     | 2      | 1.4%       |

## 4. Critical Analysis of the Visual Frames

The visual frames constructed represent how the environment is framed in the posters. Each poster, as a visual frame, articulates human beings' cognition, emotion, and attitude, constructing certain ideological messages through certain visual elements (Messaris & Abraham, 2001). In other words, the choices of visual resources metonymically express the abstract concept foregrounded in the posters. This section is both an exploration and an examination of the frames.

### 4.1 Visual Frame of Mountain-river Landscapes

The visual frame of mountain-river landscapes takes up the highest proportion. This type of frame deploys mountains and water as the main elements, with resources of blue sky, white cloud, sunlight, wood, flying birds, white fog, boat, or village coordinately constructed together. For instance, in Figure 1 (see the appendix), the image is a composition of mountains, a lake, two flying birds, wood, and white fog. The verbal resource of the poster is “enhancing biodiversity, stability, and sustainability of the ecosystem”. In the dimension of referential metonymy, the image represents a situation of two birds flying over the lake. In the dimension of conceptual metonymy, “mountain and lake” stand for “nature”, and “flying birds” stand for “living organism”. The reflection of the birds and wood in the water

metonymically represents the cleanness and quietness of the environment. Hence, the image implies “harmonious coexistence between nature and living things”, evoking human beings’ imagination of fresh air and the emotion of enjoying nature. Figure 2 is another type of landscape. In this poster, the verbal resource “Bai Hua Shan” metonymically represents the image of the mountain is Bai Hua Mountain. The visual resources represent a composition of rolling green mountains and winding roads. Roads are built for human beings, thus referring to humans. The integration of the roads and the mountains indicates a harmonious interaction between human beings and nature. The poster in Figure 3 deploys the visual resources of green mountains, a river, red flowers, and a ship sailing in the river. A ship is a vehicle for humans and thus stands for mankind. The sailing ship between green mountains evokes the imagination of the greatness of nature and the smallness of mankind. In Figure 4, the verbal resource in the poster is “building the national ecological barrier in the western part; guarding the natural ecological boundary”. The visual resources of the Rocky Mountains and villages are spatially framed into a picture of villages surrounded by mountains. As in the Chinese cultural context, mountains metonymically represent nature. The complementarity of the visual and the verbal resources implies that nature is the safety barrier. Human beings live under the protection of nature. Hence, it evokes the awareness of protecting nature.

In short, the visual mountain-river landscape frame employs traditional Chinese mountain and water symbols. The concrete images of mountains and water represent everything in nature and imply the organic solidarity between humans and nature (Ke, 2021, p. 153). It also demonstrates the Chinese philosophy, “Dao Operates Naturally”, emphasizing the harmonious coexistence (Zheng, 1995). Therefore, the visual landscape frame effectively foregrounds the concept of harmony.

#### 4.2 Visual Frame of City-townscape

Cities and towns directly reflect human activities and how residents interact with nature. It is thus an effective way to resonate with residents. The poster in Figure 5 displays a part of Fu Jian. The part of the city is a long-shot view, which metonymically refers to a picture composed of the faraway mountains, a winding river flowing to the mountains, high buildings, paddy fields, and villages. The mountains and the river stand for nature. The high buildings signify modern civilization, while the paddy fields and villages signify agricultural civilization. The golden sunlight in the view implies a successful interaction of different civilizations. Figure 6 is another poster framing Xiao Gan high-speed railway station, which is situated beside woodland and a green lake. The railway station metonymically represents industrialization, while the woodland and green lake stand for nature. It is thus a representation of harmonious coexistence between industry and nature. In Figure 7, the visual resources in the poster construct a city view with high buildings surrounded by towering mountains. The high buildings are a sign of human life. Therefore, the picture constructs an image that human beings live under the protection of nature, implying the high status of nature. The poster in Figure 8 is one more example showing a part view of Da Wan Cun in Anhui province. The verbal resources in the poster are “comprehensively promoting the urban ecological development”. The visual resources construct a view where villagers dressed in red dancewear are dancing in an open space of the village. The high mountains behind the village are a representation of nature. The composition projects a comfortable life in nature.

In brief, the visual frames of the city-townscape demonstrate the Chinese philosophy of “Heaven and Man Are United as One” by employing modern civilisation symbols, agricultural civilisation symbols, and landscape symbols, highlighting the sustainable development of human society and nature.

#### 4.3 Visual Frames of Human Actions

The visual frames of human actions include actions from individuals, volunteers, police, family, and the public. For instance, the poster of Figure 9 describes a female riding a shared bicycle in the Hutong of Beijing, with coordinating verbal resources “seeking sustainable living together”. The shared bicycle is a conceptual representation of a low-carbon life. It is therefore an invitation to others to join in the low-carbon activity. Figure 10 is a poster referring to volunteers’ activities. The logo on the T-shirts metonymically signifies that they are volunteers. They are holding soil with seedlings in their hands, which implies they are protecting nature. The visual resources in the poster of Figure 11 construct a picture in which the public, including family and students, all participate in the low-carbon activities. The visual resources, such as recycling symbols, new energy, bicycles, etc., are metonymic symbols of low-carbon. The picture evokes the imagination of the public’s enthusiasm for environmental protection. The poster in Figure 12 is another type of human activity. The people in the police uniforms metonymically signify their police

identity. The verbal resource “Promoting Environmental Pollution Prevention” coordinately represents the police taking action to prevent pollution. It is a symbol of rule by law.

The visual frames of human actions directly reveal the relationship between the environment and humans, addressing human beings’ function in protecting nature. The exemplary roles of human beings’ actions are also an invitation to the public to take part in protecting nature. Those frames also imply a strategy of governing both by virtue and law. They are designed to cultivate human beings’ ecological awareness from both external institutional power and inter-moral consciousness.

#### 4.4 The Visual Frames of Nature Reserves and Rare Species

Nature reserves are special areas set up to protect biodiversity, ecosystems, natural landscapes, and cultural values. This type of frame takes up 12.7%. For instance, the poster in Figure 13 refers to a wetland park. Birds are flying low above the land. An additional deer is jumping into the air. Such coding construction metonymically represents their pleasure, which further projects harmonious phenomena. In Figure 14, the poster describes three birds standing on land, two of which spread their wings. The image metonymically represents liberty and pleasure. In terms of imagery, nature reserves are an oasis of life, representing the green heart of the earth. Thus, it is an effective frame to evoke the public’s imagination of what nature is like.

The visual frame of rare species is a related knowledge structure. The difference is that they take rare birds or animals as the salient elements, such as Figure 15. The verbal resource in the poster metonymically represents the bird as a brocade chicken. The brocade chicken is called “phoenix” in ancient China, thus having a high cultural status. Further, in the dimension of the ecosystem, the brocade chicken has been facing threats from over-harvesting forests, illegal hunting, etc. It is therefore included in the list of rare species. In the poster, the body part of the chicken is filled with mountains and forests. It conceptually represents its extinction correlated to the destruction of the ecosystem. Therefore, this type of frame could help the public be aware that each species is closely related to a particular ecosystem and that protecting them is to maintain the stability of the ecosystem as a whole.

#### 4.5 Visual Frame of New Technology Projects

The visual frames of new technology projects are predominantly related to presenting new energy and hydraulic engineering. They are considered a reflection of the development of modern technology. For instance, posters in Figures 16 and 17 metonymically represent the new energy of wind, solar, and battery. The golden sunlight conceptually signifies such new technologies as hope for harmonious modernization. Posters in Figures 18 and 19 are about hydraulic engineering. The verbal resources in Figure 18 metonymically represent the visual resource in the poster as the South-to-North Water Diversion Project. The project was built to solve the water shortage problem in the north, aiming to improve the allocation of water resources. The visual element in the poster is the Head of Taocha Canal, which acts as the key faucet. It metonymically presents the important status of water resources. In the meantime, protecting water resources is protecting nature, implying the sustainable development of the ecosystem. In Figure 19, the verbal resources in the poster indicate the project as Xinlong Water Conservancy Project, having the function of irrigation and electricity generation. The complementarity of the words and images implies the power of the low-carbon project. In addition, the spatial layout of wide and boundless Qian Jiang evokes the imagination of the greatness of nature. In a word, the cooperation of the natural symbols and the projects in the posters signifies the hope for a harmonious environment.

#### 4.6 Visual Frames of Future Outlook

The visual frames of future outlook mainly construct life imagination in the future. For instance, in Figure 20, the visual resources in the poster describe people’s life activities in a green landscape. The integration of the verbal resources “accelerating the clean water into the Yellow River” represents a cause-and-effect relationship between life and nature. That is, clean water will improve people’s lives, evoking the public’s attention to protecting water resources. The poster in Figure 21 is an outlook of a life scene constructed by new energy technologies and various types of organisms. The layout metonymically represents the harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. The poster in Figure 22 is another outlook. In the poster, a stage is built by a peacock’s tail, metonymically representing nature. On the stage, besides a female dancer, there are natural symbols including high mountains, wood,

birds, and elephants. There are also vehicles, including aircraft and a high-speed railway. The layout implies harmonious coexistence between humans and nature.

The future outlook frame conveys a positive vision, inviting the public to participate in creating a greener and more sustainable society. In addition, as a semiotic governance, it could encourage policymakers and investors to consider long-term environmental impacts. It could also prompt them to make decisions in favour of environmental protection.

#### 4.7 Visual Frames of National Cultural Heritage

The visual frames of cultural heritage are about using cultural heritage as symbols. In Figure 23, the poster applies the heritage of the Great Wall as a resource. The long-shot view displays the Great Wall winding along the mountains. The image signifies the long history of harmonious coexistence and reminds people to respect nature. At the same time, as a valuable cultural heritage, the conservation of the Great Wall is also a reflection of environmental protection. The poster in Figure 24 employs the ancient architecture of Ningxia. In the poster, the architecture is situated under the blue sky. It reflects that the cultural heritage is well-protected. At the same time, it also signifies a good ecological environment. Such architectures are non-renewable resources and signify cultural civilization. The verbal resource “Adopting Ecological Priority Strategy, Creating Green Ecological Treasure”, metonymically represents that the ancient city is a green ecological treasure that needs protection. In Figure 25, the poster employs the image of the flowing Yellow River. The Yellow River, known as the Mother River, has nurtured the splendid Chinese civilisation and is an important ecological resource in China. The visual frame of the flowing Yellow River can arouse people’s reverence towards the ancient river. At the same time, the frame highlights its important position in the ecological environment. The poster in Figure 26 employs the image of Emperor Huang. Emperor Huang is viewed as the humanistic founder of China. By integrating the image of Emperor Huang with the theme of environmental protection, the frame employs the influence and symbolism of this ancestor to stimulate the public’s awareness of environmental protection. At the same time, as the common ancestor of China, Emperor Huang can evoke the spirit of national unity and promote public action on environmental issues. In summary, the posters use visual frames of national cultural heritages to evoke human beings’ respect for nature. Additionally, they also imply that the efforts to conserve nature will benefit not only this generation but many more to come, demonstrating its high value in history.

#### 4.8 Visual Frames of Ecological Destruction

Only two posters use the visual frames of ecological destruction, which are displayed in Figure 27 and Figure 28. The poster in Figure 27 employs the image of factories. The grey metonymically represents environmental pollution. The chemical symbols and the downward-pointing arrows refer to decreasing pollution. The coordinated verbal resources “deepening the fight against pollution” imply that environmental protection is a war, activating public awareness to defeat pollution. The poster in Figure 28 is a picture constructed by a part of the sea with a lot of plastic floating in it, in which a turtle is even entangled in a plastic bag. The picture implies that getting rid of pollution requires resistance. The words “Breaking Plastic Pollution, We are in Action” evoke the public’s awareness of the urgency of fighting against plastic pollution. Consequently, the action of fighting against pollution is a way to protect nature. However, as mentioned, this type of frame takes up the lowest proportion, suggesting that the discursive practice of environmental governance does not prefer “resistance” to activate public awareness of environmental protection.

#### 4.9 Summary

Lakoff (2010, p. 72) claims, “frames come in systems, [a semiotic resource] typically activates not only its defining frame but also much of the system its defining frame is in”. Therefore, a visual frame is an instance of the whole visual frame system. It helps activate the system of the type of visual frame. The poster designer’s choice of visual elements activates the knowledge structure of the system, framing the audience towards a specific conceptual understanding of the topic. The comprehensive analysis of the visual frames reveals that the 2023 Environmental Day posters mainly employ traditional Chinese landscape resources, such as mountains and water, to frame the concept of nature. Besides, in most of the frames, human beings are metonymically represented by buildings, vehicles, etc. Furthermore, most of the spatial constructions foreground the high status of nature. Hence, all things exist under the power of nature. Those features of the frames imply China’s eco-philosophy of ecological civilisation: “Lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets” and “Two Mountains” theory (Party Documents Research Office of the

CPC Central Committee, 2017).

In summary, Chinese eco-philosophy believes that the value of nature transcends human beings. The existence of nature is natural, and the landscape is the most intuitive symbol of nature. Through employing the symbols of landscape, the posters build pictures of “lucid waters and lush mountains”, “integration of towns and cities into lucid waters and lush mountains”, and “green economic development”. Those pictures, in the meantime, demonstrate the aesthetics of “the great beauty in heaven and earth” and the philosophical concepts of “Dao operates naturally” and “heaven and man are united as one”. They help stimulate people’s emotional resonance and yearning for nature, thus arousing people’s awareness of protecting the environment.

## 5. Conclusion

The present study analyses the features of visual frame metonymy in a corpus of 142 Environment Day posters in China from a critical discourse perspective. The analysis first describes the visual frames. It is found that the visual frames of mountain-river landscapes and city-townscape take up the highest proportion. The following are the visual frames of human actions, nature reserves, rare species, future outlook, and national cultural heritages. The visual frame of ecological destruction takes up the lowest proportion. The analysis then explains the properties of the frames. It is found that the visual elements of mountains and waters are predominant resources used for signifying nature. Their specific spatial constructions in the posters highlight their important status. Besides, the constructions of the elements frame the knowledge structure of the harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. As an instance of the visual frame system, the visual frame could evoke the public to imagine the entire picture of harmonious coexistence. In addition, it is also an invitation to the public to engage in environmental protection activities.

In summary, the study reveals that the posters, as a type of visual discourse, reflect the rhetorical motives of demonstrating the “Two Mountains” concept. The strategy of the visual frame metonymy used in the posters evokes the public’s cognition and emotion related to environmental issues. As a visual practice of environmental communication, it enriches the environmental governance discourse. Future research can further compare the visual metonymy mechanisms of environmental governance posters in different countries to facilitate the communication and practice of semiotic governance of global environmental issues.

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### Appendix: Posters Used in the Analysis Are as Follows

| Figures | Images  | Title of the Images  |
|---------|---|--|
| 1       |    | Enhancing biodiversity, stability, and sustainability of the ecosystem                                 |
| 2       |   | Building a Modernization of Harmony Between Humanity and Nature  |
| 3       |  | Building a land of green mountains and clear waters  |
| 4       |  | Building the national ecological barrier in the western part; guarding the natural ecological boundary |





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| <p>5</p> |    | <p>Building a Beautiful Fujian in Harmonious Coexistence between Humanity and Nature</p> |
| <p>6</p> |    | <p>Enhancing Ecosystem Quality in Xiaogan</p>  |
| <p>7</p> |   | <p>Building a Modernization of Harmony Between Humanity and Nature</p>                   |
| <p>8</p> |  | <p>Comprehensively promoting the ecological revitalization of rural areas</p>            |

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| <p>9</p>  |    | <p>Join the Carbon Quest for a Sustainable and Beautiful Life</p>      |
| <p>10</p> |    | <p>Building a Modernization of Harmony Between Humanity and Nature</p> |
| <p>11</p> |   | <p>Building a Modernization of Harmony Between Humanity and Nature</p> |
| <p>12</p> |  | <p>Building a Modernization of Harmony Between Humanity and Nature</p> |

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|-----------|---|--|
| <p>13</p> |    | <p>Building a Modernization of Harmony Between Humanity and Nature</p> |
| <p>14</p> |    | <p>Building a Modernization of Harmony Between Humanity and Nature</p> |
| <p>15</p> |   | <p>Building a Modernization of Harmony Between Humanity and Nature</p> |
| <p>16</p> |  | <p>Building a Modernization of Harmony Between Humanity and Nature</p> |

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| 17 |  <p>建设人与自然和谐共生的现代化<br/>有序推进碳达峰碳中和行动</p>  | Building a Modernization of Harmony Between Humanity and Nature   |
| 18 |  <p>南水北调<br/>中线工程<br/>水源地保护</p>          | Protection of the Water Source Area for the Middle Route of the South-to-North Water Diversion Project  |
| 19 |  <p>绿色低碳发展<br/>“潜”力无限</p>               | Green and low-carbon development has tremendous potential   |
| 20 |  <p>建设人与自然和谐共生的现代化<br/>加快实现一泓清水入黄河</p> | Building a Modernization of Harmony Between Humanity and Nature: Accelerate the realization of a steady flow of clear water into the Yellow River |

|           |   |  |
|-----------|---|--|
| <p>21</p> |    | <p>Building a pilot zone for green and low-carbon high-quality development</p>                               |
| <p>22</p> |    | <p>Building a Modernization of Harmony Between Humanity and Nature</p>                                       |
| <p>23</p> |   | <p>Building a Modernization of Harmony Between Humanity and Nature</p>                                       |
| <p>24</p> |  | <p>Ningxia Blue: Implementing the Ecological Priority Strategy to Build a Green Ecological Treasure Land</p> |

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|----|---|--|
| 25 |    | Building a Modernization of Harmony Between Humanity and Nature: Build an important experimental zone for ecological protection and high-quality development in the Yellow River Basin |
| 26 |    | Ecological conservation of the Yellow River Basin  |
| 27 |   | Intensifying the battle against pollution  |
| 28 |  | Breaking the Plastic Pollution Crisis: Our Actions in Progress   |