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| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# Semiotic Construction of Strong Maritime Country in *Marine Eco-Environmental Protection in China*: Systemic Functional Lingustics Perspective

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| **ABSTRACT**

This study explores how the white paper *Marine Eco-Environmental Protection in China* discursively constructs China's image as a strong maritime country through Martin and White's Attitude System in Appraisal Theory. Using a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the 13,843-word English corpus annotated by UAM Corpus Tool 6.2., the research examines the distribution of attitudinal resources—Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation—and their roles in shaping maritime identities. The findings reveal that positive evaluations dominate (96% of attitudinal resources), framing China's marine protection efforts as successful, ethical, and globally aligned. Judgment are central to constructing five distinct images: "Effective Maritime Governor" (institutional competence), "Maritime Environmental Protector" (ecological tenacity), "Eco-Economic Maritime Developer" (sustainable growth), "Global Maritime Collaborator" (international cooperation), and "People-Oriented Maritime Builder" (public well-being). Affective resources reinforce societal welfare, while appreciation highlights policy value and innovation. The study contributes theoretically by expanding Appraisal Theory's application to Chinese political discourse in marine governance, demonstrating how evaluative language semiotically projects multifaceted maritime identities. Practically, it offers insights into leveraging linguistic strategies in official texts to communicate national visions and enhance global credibility. This research underscores the role of discourse in shaping perceptions of maritime power, reflecting China's commitment to sustainable development and collaborative ocean governance.

| **KEYWORDS**

Appraisal Theory; Marine Eco-Environmental Protection; Strong Maritime Country; Attitudinal Resources; National Image Construction

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## 1. Introduction

Within global maritime governance, China's strategic aim to become a "strong maritime nation" is articulated and institutionalized through political discourse in official white papers. As a genre of political communication, white papers encapsulate policy frameworks and ideological commitments, making them vital sites for analyzing how language shapes perceptions of governance and sovereignty. The State Council's *Marine Eco-Environmental Protection in China* white paper, for instance, situates China's marine policies within global ecological imperatives, highlighting the interplay between political language, national image, and maritime power.

Political discourse, marked by emotional intensity, genre diversity, and linguistic complexity, has been examined from multiple perspectives—from rhetorical and semantic analysis (Beard, 2000; Chilton, 2004) to critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1989; Van Dijk, 1994; Khalil & Abbas, 2018), cognitive linguistics (Lakoff, 2002; Charteris-Black, 2004; Conoscenti, 2013; Norocel, 2010),

corpus linguistics (Schröter & Storjohann, 2015; Burns, 2011), sociopragmatic inquiry (Yang Min，2010), translation studies (Hou, 2021; Kang&Li, 2018; Zhang, 2016), and metaphor and ideology research (Liang & Wang, 2015; Chen & Jian, 2019; Hu, 2020). Although scholars have examined political discourse through lenses ranging from rhetoric and semantics to corpus methods, sociopragmatics, translation, and metaphor-ideology studies, Appraisal Theory has seldom been applied to original ecological governance texts—especially on marine protection—and the role of attitude resources in shaping national image and ecological values remains underexplored. Therefore, this study employs the Attitude System of Appraisal Theory to analyze China's White Paper on Marine Eco-Environmental Protection, revealing how it constructs China's maritime power image and communicates its ecological philosophy.

This research contributes to both academic and practical domains: theoretically, it enriches the application of Appraisal Theory to Chinese political discourse, particularly in under-researched areas of marine governance; empirically, it offers insights into how official texts like white papers leverage evaluative language to construct multifaceted maritime identities, informing strategies for effective communication of national visions in an era of ecological interdependence. Ultimately, it underscores the power of political discourse in shaping not just domestic narratives, but also international perceptions of China's role in global marine governance.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Among the three pure metafunctions within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as formulated by Halliday, the interpersonal metafunction concerns language as a means of social interaction: establishing and sustaining relationships, influencing others' behavior, expressing judgments and evaluations of phenomena, and negotiating or reshaping viewpoints (Martin, 1992; Thompson 1996; Huang 2001) . In traditional Systemic Functional Grammar, the principal lexico-grammatical mechanisms for enacting interpersonal meaning are mood and modality. Halliday's account of evaluation, however, is concise, noting only comment adjuncts and attitudinal epithets as evaluative resources—an omission that invites further inquiry into the mechanisms of appraisal.
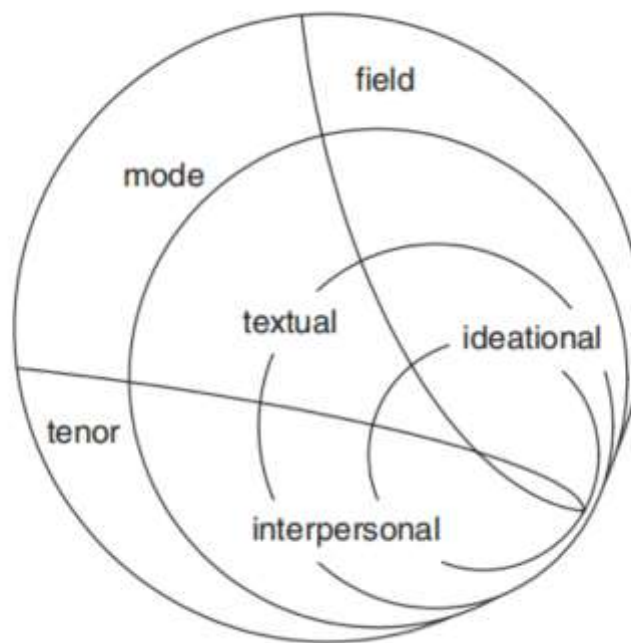


**Figure 1. Halliday's metefunctions and register (Martin & White, 2005: 27)**

Unlike the particulate ideational metafunction or the cyclical textual metafunction, interpersonal meaning is heavily semantically loaded and instantiated prosodically (Martin, 1992). Although evaluative meaning often clusters around the Subject and finite elements of a clause, it is not restricted to any single grammatical slot; rather, it permeates discourse, realized through grammatical and lexical choices as well as through mood and intonation (Halliday, 1994). This prosodic dispersion underscores the need to broaden models of interpersonal meaning to encompass evaluation resources—devices that transcend discrete grammatical structures and recur throughout discourse. Moreover, in written texts—where the declarative mood predominates—mood alone inadequately accounts for interpersonal meaning(Li, 2002), further elevating the role of evaluation in constructing

interpersonal stance in writing.

To systematize the semantics of evaluation, Martin et al. (1990s) developed the Appraisal framework within SFL, comprising three interrelated subsystems: Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation ((Martin and White, 2005)). The Attitude subsystem—central to Appraisal—provides intersubjective resources for evaluating participants and processes according to emotional responses or culturally conditioned value    systems ((Martin and White, 2005)) 's "resources for expressing, intensifying, and responding to affect; making moral judgments; and offering aesthetic evaluations"). Attitude further subdivides into Affect (psychological evaluation), Judgment (ethical evaluation of behavior), and Appreciation (aesthetic evaluation of entities and phenomena).

Affect lies at the core of Attitude and underpins both Judgment and Appreciation. It conveys emotional responses via mental and attributive relational processes, and may be nominalized through ideational metaphor. Judgment assesses behavior against institutionalized norms— classifying acts as moral/ immoral, legal/ illegal, acceptable/ unacceptable, praiseworthy/ deplorable— typically realized through adverbial circumstances of manner, adjectival epithets or attributes, and attitudinally charged nouns and verbs. Appreciation, by contrast, evaluates objects, processes, texts, and abstract structures according to aesthetic or social-value criteria. The layers of the attitude system for annotation is built-up, and it is presented in Figure 2.
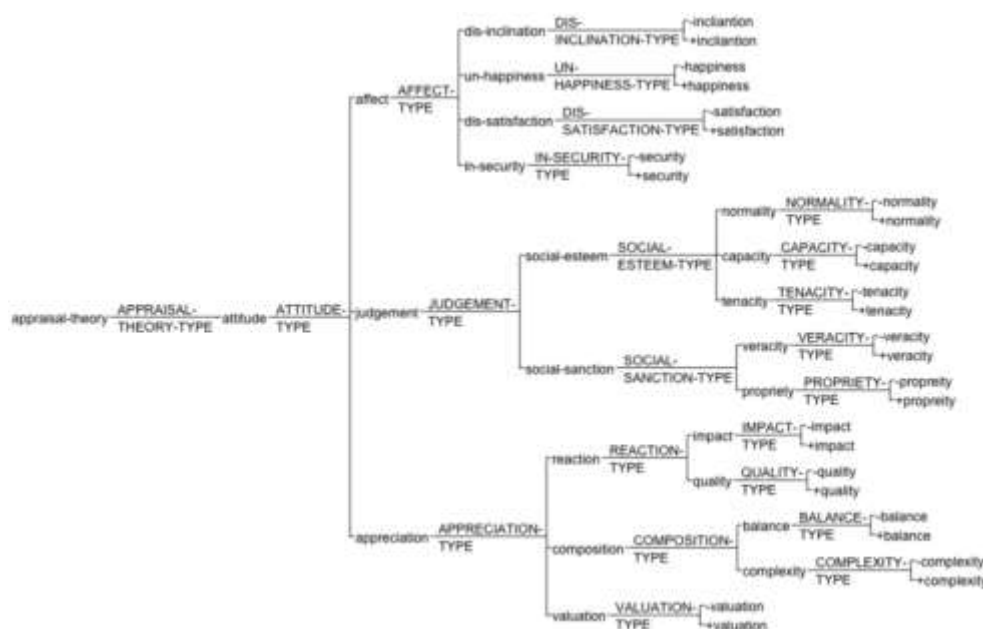


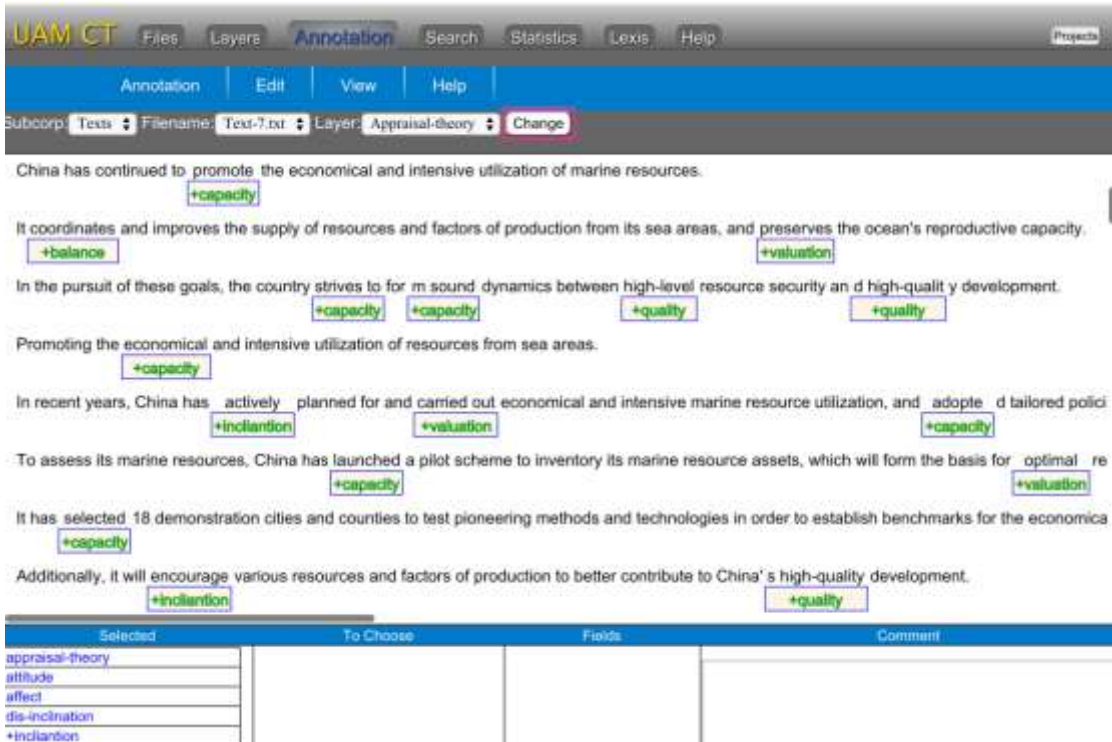**Figure 2. Attitude system in the Appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005: 45)**

## 3. Research Methodology
This study adopts the attitude system as the theoretical framework，focusing on the attitudinal resources in *Marine Eco-Environmental Protection in China*. It aims to address three questions:

  a. The distribution features of attitudinal resources in *Marine Eco-Environmental Protection in China*.
  b. What specific images of a strong maritime country are constructed by the attitudinal resources in *Marine Eco-Environmental Protection in China*?
  c. What influences the language choices of attitudinal resources in constructing those images.

The corpus selected for this study is the English version of the white paper *Marine Eco-Environmental Protection in China*, published on July 11, 2024, by the State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China. The white paper, available in both Chinese and English, systematically outlines China's concepts, practices, and achievements in marine eco-environmental protection. The main body of the text consists of nine sections, all of which are included in this study, comprising a total of 13,843 words.

The annotation tool used is UAM CorpusTool 6.2, which supports various annotation types, including part-of-speech tagging, syntactic annotation, semantic annotation, etc. Users can also customize annotations according to their needs. This study adopts a manual rather than an automatic approach, as attitude resources need to be interpreted within context for capturing the nuanced use of evaluative language.

This study uses the attitude system under Martin's Appraisal Theory as the research framework and adopts a qualitative and quantitative research method. Qualitative analysis focuses on the description of the collected material, in this study, the distribution features of different attitudinal resources as well as the images constructed in the given context; quantitative analysis is mainly focused on the data statistics and analysis, including the number and percentage of different kinds of attitude resources.

## 4. Results and Discussion

As discussed in the previous section, the Appraisal Theory aims to explain how individuals process and evaluate information and events in their environment. Among its three sub-systems, the attitude system is concerned with the evaluation of people's attitudes, making it useful for detecting the underlying emotions and opinions of authors across various written texts. There are three sub-systems in the attitude system: affect, judgment, and appreciation. Affect refers to the emotional reflections on actions, things, and phenomena; judgment consists of language resources for evaluating people's behaviors; and appreciation deals with the evaluation of "things" that we make and the performance we give (Martin and White, 2005).

**Table 1 Distribution of Attitudinal Resources in *Marine Eco-Environmental Protection in China***

| Attitude-Type | Positive (number) | Negative (number) | Total (number) | Proportion (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Affect | 89 | 6 | 95 | 10% |
| Judgement | 417 | 12 | 429 | 46% |
| Appreciation | 383 | 18 | 401 | 44% |
| Total | 889 | 36 | 925 | 100% |
| Proportion | 96% | 4% | 100% | |

**Table 2 Category and Frequency of Appraisers and Appraised in *Marine Eco-Environmental Protection in China***

| Appraiser | Appraised | Frequency (number) | Proportion (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Chinese Government and Institutions | Marine Eco-Environment and Protection Actions | 308 | 33% |
| | Policies, Regulations, and Governance Systems | 235 | 25% |
| | Marine Economy and Green Transformation | 167 | 18% |
| International Community and Public | International Cooperation and Global Governance | 126 | 14% |
| | Social Participation and Public Well being | 89 | 10% |
| Total | | 925 | 100% |

As shown in Table 1, positive evaluations dominate the discourse, constituting 96% of all attitudinal resources (889 instances), while negative evaluations account for a mere 4% (36 instances). This overwhelming positivity underscores a deliberate narrative framing China's marine protection efforts as successful, progressive, and morally justified. Judgement (47% of total attitudes) is the most frequent appraisal type, emphasizing China's institutional competence and propriety in governance. Appreciation (43%) highlights the value of marine ecosystems and policies. Affect (10%), though less prominent, conveys collective pride and optimism.

Table 2 further elucidates the dynamics between appraisers and appraised entities. Appraisers cluster into two principal groups: the Chinese government and its affiliated bodies (710 instances, 77%) and the international community together with the public (215, 23%). The domestic authorities concentrate their evaluations on three key areas—Marine Eco-Environment and Protection Actions (308 instances, 43%), Policies, Regulations, and Governance Systems (235 instances, 33%), and Marine Economy and Green Transformation (167 instances, 24%)—thereby casting the state as a proactive guardian, policy pioneer, and driver of green industrial development. In turn, the international community and public offer predominantly positive evaluations of International Cooperation and Global Governance (126 instances, 59%) and Social Participation and Public Well-Being (89 instances, 41%), depicting China as a cooperative global stakeholder and advocate for societal welfare in maritime affairs. Some of the examples are as follows, in which the attitudinal resources are undelined:

(1) Marine disasters pose serious threats to marine ecosystems.(text-5)

(2) Facing a deteriorating marine eco-environment, all countries are members of a community of shared future.(text-4)

(3) It utilizes science-based decision-making and targeted measures that aim to safeguard eco-environmental security and improve the diversity, stability and sustainability of marine ecosystems.(text-5)

(4) One innovative aspect of the Blue Circle model is its visual traceability.(text-2)

The lexical choices in these examples semiotically construct China's identity as a strong maritime country by intertwining ecological imperatives with strategic governance. In Example (1), the phrase "pose serious threats to" employs a negative appraisal to frame marine disasters as existential challenges, positioning China's role not merely as a responder but as a proactive guardian of ecological security. Example (2)'s use of "deteriorating" extends this logic globally, invoking a shared ethical imperative that transcends borders. By framing environmental decline as a collective crisis, the discourse elevates China's leadership in multilateral initiatives as both a moral duty and a geopolitical necessity, redefining maritime power through global solidarity rather than unilateral dominance. Example (3)'s "science-based" and "targeted" function as epistemic markers, valorizing China's governance as a paradigm of ecological modernity. These terms contrast fragmented global approaches, positioning China's integration of satellite monitoring, big data analytics, and land-sea coordination as a civilizational advancement—where rationality and precision redefine sustainability as a measurable, systemic project. Finally, Example (4)'s "innovative" transcends mere technical praise, symbolizing a cultural shift toward cyclical coexistence with nature. The Blue Circle model, with its blockchain-enabled traceability, becomes a metaphor for China's fusion of technological prowess and Confucian harmony, positioning innovation as both a strategic tool and an ethical commitment.

Collectively, these lexical strategies reframe maritime power as a synthesis of ecological sovereignty, global responsibility, and civilizational confidence.

### 4.1 Affect Construction in Marine Eco-Environmental Protection in China

Affect falls within the scope of psychology and refers to a reaction to behavior, text/processes, or phenomena. It is usually realized through psychological processes, but it can also be conveyed through relational and behavioral processes. （Liu，2010）Table 3 displays the descriptive statistics of affect resources in *Marine Eco-Environmental Protection in China*.

**Table 3 Distribution of Affect Resources in *Marine Eco-Environmental Protection in China***

| Affect-Type | Postive (number) | Negative (number) | Total (number) | Proportion (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dis/inclination | 54 | 0 | 54 | 57% |
| Un/happiness | 7 | 0 | 7 | 7% |
| Dis/satisfaction | 9 | 3 | 12 | 13% |
| In/security | 19 | 3 | 22 | 23% |
| Total | 89 | 6 | 95 | 100% |
| Proportion | 94% | 6% | 100% | |

As illustrated in Table 3, the distribution of affect resources in China's marine eco-environmental protection discourse reveals a striking dominance of positive emotional evaluations, which constitute 94% (89 instances) of the total affect-related expressions, compared to a negligible 6% (6 instances) of negative evaluations. This overwhelming positivity foreground confidence, resolve, and institutional efficacy in addressing ecological challenges. The subcategory of dis/inclination emerges as the most prominent, accounting for 57% (54 instances) of all affect resources, with all instances reflecting positive volitional commitments such as institutional determination and collective resolve. Following this, in/security represents 23% (22 instances) of the total, predominantly emphasizing proactive safeguarding of marine ecosystems (19 positive instances while minimally acknowledging risks (3 negative instances) . The remaining subsystems—dis/satisfaction (13%, 12 instances) and un/happiness (7%, 7 instances)—are sparingly utilized, with negative evaluations limited to dis/satisfaction (3 instances). These patterns reflect a calculated avoidance of overtly critical or pessimistic language, instead channeling limited dissatisfaction into calls for systemic refinement.

### 4.2 Dis/inclination Resources

The concept of dis/inclination belongs to the non-realistic affect category, always caused by external factors, including fear or desires caused by external factors. The upper semantic layer is dis/inclination, and the lower semantic layer is fear and desire. When there is fear, behavioral fluctuations may include trembling, shuddering, and cowering, and the mood may be wary, fearful, or terrorized. When there is desire, behavioral fluctuations may include suggesting, requesting, demanding, and the mood may be missing, longing for, or yearning for. Some examples are presented as follows:

| Image (Strong Maritime Country) | Example | Appraiser | Appraised |
|---|---|---|---|
| Effective Maritime Governor | (5) China amended…will bear responsibility for the environmental quality of sea areas under their jurisdiction.(Text-6) | Chinese Government | Policies, Regulations, and Governace Systems |
| People-Oriented Maritime Builder· | (6) They encourage people…and personal engagement with the sea among the public.(Text-7) | Chinese Government | Social Participation and Public Wellbeing |
| Global Maritime Collaborator | (7) China supports advancing global marine eco-environmental protection… UNCLOS and other international conventions concerning the sea.(Text-8) | Chinese Government | Marine Eco-Environment and Protection Actions |

For example (5), the word "will" reflects not just a simple expression of intention, but also China's forward - looking and institutional arrangements in marine governance. By amending laws to clarify responsibilities, it ensures the environmental quality of sea areas, demonstrating the normativeness and effectiveness of governance. This is the deep - level institutional guarantee for the image of an "Effective Maritime Governor", showing that China's marine governance is based on a sound legal and regulatory system, ensuring long - term and stable management of sea areas. In example (6) the word "encourage" implies a series of policy measures and publicity guidance behind it. It aims to enhance public marine awareness, enabling the public not only to participate but also to obtain cognitive and emotional connections with the sea during participation. This is crucial for building a social foundation for a strong maritime country. It reflects that under the people - oriented concept, China focuses on cultivating public marine literacy and participation, which is the social cornerstone for the sustainable development of the maritime cause. Regarding example (7) , the word "supports" indicates that China is not only a participant but also a defender of rules and a leader in promoting global marine ecological protection in international maritime affairs. By supporting the implementation of international conventions, China enhances its voice and influence in global marine governance, constructing the image of a responsible "Global Maritime Collaborator". This promotes the improvement and development of the global marine governance system, showing China's commitment to global marine ecological security and the building of a community with a shared future for mankind in the maritime field.

### 4.3 Un/happiness Resources

The un/happiness set of meanings involves the mood of feeling happy or sad, and the possibility of directing these feelings at a trigger by liking or disliking it (Martin & White, 2005). Happiness is considered a positive emotion that arises from the evaluation or appraisal of a specific event or situation. It is a subjective experience characterized by feelings of love, enjoyment, and cheerfulness and a result of perceiving an event or situation as beneficial, desirable, or congruent with one's goals and values. Unhappiness results from individuals' evaluations of negative events or situations that they perceive as significant and threatening to their well-being and is characterized by feelings such as sadness, dislike, and hate. Some of the examples of un/happiness attitudinal resources are demonstrated as follows:

| Image (Strong Maritime Country) | Example | Appraiser | Appraised |
|---|---|---|---|
| People-Oriented Maritime Builder· | (8) People can safely enjoy the sea…(Text-1) | Public | Marine Economy and Green Transformation |
| People-Oriented Maritime Builder· | (9) It works to ensure that the people can have safe and green seafood,…and happiness.(Text-2) | Public | Marine Economy and Green Transformation |
| Eco-Economic Maritime Developer | (10) Focusing on "…, enjoyable life, and clean production"…(Text-5) | Chinese Government | Marine Economy and Green Transformation |

In example (8),the word "enjoy" embodies the public's positive emotional experience of the sea, reflecting a positive evaluation of the safe and pleasant maritime environment. This constructs the "People-Oriented Maritime Builder" image, emphasizing that marine development prioritizes public enjoyment and well-being, in line with the concept of happiness as a positive emotional response to beneficial situations. In example (9), "It works to ensure that the people can have safe and green seafood,…and happiness," directly connects "happiness" to public emotional well - being. This reinforces the "People-Oriented Maritime Builder" image, demonstrating that marine economy and green transformation are aimed at ensuring public happiness, a clear manifestation of positive evaluation and concern for public welfare, thus fulfilling the connotation of happiness.

For example (10), the term "enjoyable" signifies a positive evaluation of life quality. The Chinese Government's emphasis on an "enjoyable life" in marine economic development constructs the "Eco-Economic Maritime Developer" image. By integrating clean production with an enjoyable life, it reflects a positive approach to balancing economic and ecological aspects, creating a desirable situation that aligns with the definition of happiness as a positive emotional outcome from favorable circumstances.

### 4.4 Dis/satisfaction Resources

The concept of dis/satisfaction in appraisal theory focuses on our emotions regarding our feelings of accomplishment and frustration related to the activities we engaged in, whether as participants or observers. It is related to people's feelings in the process of pursuing their goals (Martin & Rose, 2007). Some examples are listed as follows:

| Image (Strong Maritime Country) | Example | Appraiser | Appraised |
|---|---|---|---|
| Effective Maritime Governor | (11) Illegal and unauthorized utilization of …punished.(Text-6) | Chinese Government | Social Participation and Public Well being |
| People-Oriented Maritime Builder· | (12)People can safely enjoy the sea, with a greater sense of satisfaction and happiness.(Text-1) | Public | Marine Economy and Green Transformati on |
| Eco-Economic Maritime Developer | (13) ….with good to excellent water quality, eliminate substandard waters in…  (Text-4) | Chinese Government | Marine Economy and Green Transformati on |

For example (11), "illegal" and "unauthorized" show the Chinese Government's crackdown on improper behaviors. This demonstrates effective governance, constructing the "Effective Maritime Governor" image by ensuring that social participation and public well-being are not disrupted by illegal activities, thus bringing a sense of order and satisfaction. In example (12), "satisfaction" in "People can safely enjoy the sea, with a greater sense of satisfaction and happiness" directly reflects the public's contentment from enjoying the sea. This constructs the "People - Oriented Maritime Builder" image, centering on the people's experience and ensuring they gain satisfaction in marine - related activities. Regarding example (13), "excellent"indicates that the Chinese Government achieves high-quality results in marine economy and green transformation. By eliminating substandard waters, it brings a sense of accomplishment, constructing the "Eco-Economic Maritime Developer" image, which emphasizes the quality of eco-economic development and satisfies the pursuit of a healthy marine environment.

### 4.5 In/security Resources

In/security encompasses our feelings of peace and anxiety concerning our environments, which includes the people who share it with us (Martin & White, 2005). Security is characterized by feelings of safety, stability, and predictability, which can foster positive affective outcomes. In contrast, insecurity is characterized by feelings of anxiety, unease, and uncertainty. It can be seen from the table that there are more insecurity resources in the white papers than security ones, which reflects the severe challenge China and the world are facing. Some examples are listed as follows:

| Image (Strong Maritime Country) | Example | Appraiser | Appraised |
|---|---|---|---|
| Effective Maritime Governor | (14) In the face of the global challenge to the marine eco-environment... (Text-9) | Chinese Government | Marine Eco-Environment and Protection Actions |
| Eco-Economic Maritime Developer | (15) Championing the principle of planning together...(Text-8) | Chinese Government | Social Participation and Public Well being |
| Maritime Environmental Protector | (16) ...overall plan for marine development, built strong safeguards for marine...(Text-2) | Chinese Government and Institutions | Policies, Regulations, and Governance Systems |

In example (14), the noun "challenge" in the phrase "the global challenge to the marine eco-environment" invokes a sense of vulnerability by framing the marine realm as imperiled. Yet the Chinese Government's proactive engagement with this very challenge subtly recasts it as an "Effective Maritime Governor," one that confronts risks head-on and strives to reestablish ecological security. In example (15), the adverb "together" in "Championing the principle of planning together" conveys reassurance and collective resolve. By spotlighting joint planning, it cultivates stability and predictability in societal participation and public welfare, thereby projecting the persona of an "Eco-Economic Maritime Developer" devoted to balanced, communal advancement. In example (16), the verb "safeguards" in "built strong safeguards for marine" explicitly materializes the concept of security. These protective frameworks guarantee safety and continuity in marine development, forging the image of a "Maritime Environmental Protector" through institutional measures that enhance predictability and resilience in maritime governance.

In summary, the discourse on China's marine eco-environmental protection strategically constructs a multifaceted institutional and societal image through a pronounced emphasis on positive affect resources (94% of total instances), reflecting confidence, resolve, and systemic efficacy. Central to this narrative is the portrayal of China as an Effective Maritime Governor, underscored by dis/inclination resources (57%) such as "will" and "supports," which highlight proactive governance, legal rigor, and institutional accountability in ensuring marine ecological security. Simultaneously, the People-Oriented Maritime Builder image emerges through un/happiness (7%) and dis/satisfaction (13%) resources like "enjoy," "happiness," and "satisfaction," emphasizing public well-being, safe marine access, and societal engagement to align marine development with grassroots welfare. The Eco-Economic Maritime Developer image bridges ecological and economic priorities, exemplified by terms like "enjoyable life" and "excellent water quality," showcasing efforts to harmonize clean production, quality of life, and sustainable growth. Internationally, China is framed as a Global Maritime Collaborator and Environmental Protector, leveraging in/security resources (23%) such as "challenge" and "safeguards" to acknowledge global marine risks while emphasizing collective action ("planning together") and institutional resilience, positioning the nation as a proactive advocate for multilateral governance and ecological security. The scarcity of negative evaluations (6%) is tactically redirected toward systemic refinement rather than critique, reinforcing a narrative of institutional competence, societal harmony, and forward-looking progress in addressing marine environmental challenges.

### 4.6 Judgement Construction in Marine Eco-Environmental Protection in China

Judgment is the meaning construction of our attitudes to people and the way they behave. It is the realm of aesthetic assessment of human behavior (Thompson, 2008), drawing on and constructing "norms about how people should and shouldn't behave" (Martin, 2000). It can be divided into those dealing with "social esteem" and those oriented to "social sanction". Social esteem has to do with "normality" (how unusual someone is), "capacity" (how capable they are), and "tenacity" (how resolute they are); Social sanction has to do with "veracity" (how truthful someone is) and "propriety" (how ethical someone is). Table 4 displays the descriptive statistics of judgment resources in *Marine Eco-Environmental Protection in China*.

**Table 4 Distribution of Judgement Resources in *Marine Eco-Environmental Protection in China***

| Judgement-Type | | Postive (number) | Negative (number) | Total （number） | Proportion （%） |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Social Esteem | Normality | 23 | 0 | 23 | 6% |
| | Capacity | 266 | 3 | 269 | 76% |
| | Tenecity | 66 | 0 | 66 | 18% |
| | Total | 355 | 3 | 358 | 100% |
| | Proportion | 98% | 2% | 100% | |
| Social Sanction | Veracity | 9 | 0 | 9 | 12% |
| | Propriety | 63 | 0 | 63 | 87% |
| | Total | 72 | 0 | 72 | 100% |
| | Proportion | 100% | 0% | 100% | |

As shown in Table 4, judgment resources significantly contribute to constructing the image of a strong maritime country. Within "Social Esteem," the "Capacity" sub-type, with a substantial number of positive judgments (266 out of 269), prominently highlights China's robust capability in marine eco - environmental protection. This strong positive evaluation of capacity is crucial for portraying a maritime country equipped with the necessary skills and strength to manage and protect its marine environment. Within the "Tenacity" parameter, the unanimous positive valence (66 instances, 0 negative) transcends mere quantitative dominance, discursively encoding China's longitudinal commitment to marine conservation. This persistent orientation aligns with the temporal demands of ecological restoration, where multi-generational policy continuity becomes a prerequisite for measurable environmental outcomes. The complete absence of counter-narratives in this category further naturalizes the nation's conservation ethos as an immutable national characteristic rather than a transient political agenda. The "Normality" subcategory's moderately positive profile (23 instances) performs crucial ideological work by positioning China's maritime policies within established international governance frameworks.

Turning to "Social Sanction," the "Veracity" component's limited yet strategically distributed positive markers (9 instances) function as authenticity validators for China's environmental reporting mechanisms. More significantly, the "Propriety" subcategory's robust affirmative evaluations (63 instances) construct an ethical architecture for maritime governance, positioning China's actions as both legally compliant and morally exemplary within transnational environmental discourse. The systematic exclusion of negative judgments across this dimension constitutes an erasure strategy that suppresses alternative narratives, thereby consolidating an image of policy infallibility.

Together, these intersecting strands of capacity, perseverance, normative conformity, truthfulness, and ethical appropriateness co-construct a richly textured—and decidedly positive—image of China as a robust maritime nation, one both capable of and committed to responsible stewardship of the ocean environment.

### *4.7 Normality Resources*
Normality concerns with how unusual someone or something is. In appraisal theory, normality refers to the evaluation of an event or situation based on its congruence or deviated from a standard or expected norm. It involves assessing whether something is typical, expected, or abnormal in a given context. It plays an important role in the appraisal process as it helps people make sense of their experiences and emotions by comparing an event to the social norms, which can help us determine the significance and emotional impact of the event or character. Some examples are listed as follows:

| Image (Strong Maritime Country) | Example | Appraiser | Appraised |
|---|---|---|---|
| Effective Maritime Governor | (17) ...the country has published special national protection action plans or programs...(Text-5) | Chinese Government | Marine Eco-Environment and Protection Actions |
| Maritime Environmental Protector | (18) Jiangsu Province have prioritized eco-environmental protection...(Text-4) | Chinese Government | Marine Eco-Environment and Protection Actions |
| Eco-Economic Maritime Developer | (19) China's seagoing rivers generally remained         stable with slight improvement...(Text-4) | Chinese Government | Marine Economy and Green Transformati on |

In example (17), the adjective accentuates the bespoke nature and strategic relevance of these initiatives. By devising dedicated, national-level schemes for marine eco-environmental protection, the Chinese Government asserts its role as an "Effective Maritime Governor," demonstrating both proactive leadership and systematic planning in maritime management. In example (18), the past participle "prioritized" signals that ecological conservation is accorded primary importance. This lexical choice aligns with the image of a "Maritime Environmental Protector," underscoring the Chinese Government's commitment to preserving marine ecosystems and elevating ecological well-being. Describing China's seagoing rivers as having "remained stable with slight improvement" employs "stable" to evoke a sense of measured equilibrium. Under government stewardship, such steadiness amid green and economic transformation casts the state as an "Eco-Economic Maritime Developer," one that skillfully balances environmental integrity with sustainable growth to achieve harmonious marine development.

### 4.8 Capacity Resources
Capacity represents the individual's perception of their ability to cope with the situation or event that elicits the emotion (Scherer, 1999). It can also refer to someone's potential to achieve a certain goal or exhibit a specific attribute. Some examples are listed as follows:

| Image (Strong Maritime Country) | Example | Appraiser | Appraised |
|---|---|---|---|
| Eco-Economic Maritime Developer | (20) ...with highly vulnerable ecosystems due to factors such as coastal erosion.(Text-5) | Chinese Government | Marine Economy and Green Transformati on |
| Effective Maritime Governor | (21) It has gradually strengthened     overall planning...(Text-2) | Chinese Government | Policies, Regulations, and Governance Systems |
| Effective Maritime Governor | (22) Through this, the country has implemented a marine spatial planning system...(Text-3) | Chinese Government | Policies, Regulations, and Governance Systems |

The adjective "vulnerable" in example(20) The word "vulnerable" in "with highly vulnerable ecosystems due to factors such as coastal erosion" highlights the fragility of marine ecosystems. While indicating a challenge, it also implies the Chinese Government's awareness of this state, which is foundational to exercising capacity in eco-economic development. By recognizing vulnerability, the government can develop strategies to address it, aligning with the "Eco - Economic Maritime Developer" image.

It shows the capacity to acknowledge and prepare for challenges in balancing marine economy and ecology. When the text notes that authorities have "gradually strengthened overall planning," the past participle "strengthened" charts a clear improvement in strategic capacity. This choice of wording suggests not just incremental adjustments but a systematic bolstering of governance frameworks—thereby projecting the "Effective Maritime Governor" persona, one that continuously refines maritime policy, regulation, and management mechanisms. Similarly, the verb "implemented" in the phrase "implemented a marine spatial planning system" shifts focus from intention to action. It emphasizes the government's operational competence in turning blueprints into functioning structures, a core attribute of an "Effective Maritime Governor." By foregrounding implementation, the narrative underscores institutional efficacy in orchestrating maritime spatial arrangements that guide sustainable use and conservation.

### 4.9 Tenacity Resources

In the case of tenacity, the appraisal focuses on the target's achievements and their ability to demonstrate determination and perseverance in working towards a goal. Any successful accomplishments or displays of unwavering commitment can evoke positive values associated with tenacity. Some examples are listed as follows:

| Image (Strong Maritime Country) | Example | Appraiser | Appraised |
|---|---|---|---|
| Maritime Environmental Protector | (23) It takes solid action to tackle prominent marine eco-environment...(Text-7) | Chinese Government | Marine Eco-Environment and Protection Actions |
| Maritime Environmental Protector | (24) It meticulously assesses the operation of these sites to ensure ...(Text-2) | Chinese Government | Marine Eco-Environment and Protection Actions |
| Effective Maritime Governor | (25) ...laying firm marine eco-environmental foundations for building...(Text-5) | Chinese Government | Policies, Regulations, and Governance Systems |

In example (23), the adjective "solid" in underscores the government's employment of decisive, substantial measures to confront ecological challenges. Such firmness conveys an unwavering commitment to marine protection, projecting the "Maritime Environmental Protector" persona through persistent, resolute intervention. This lexical choice aligns with the image of an Environmentally Sustainable Maritime Country, where policy is grounded in action rather than rhetoric. In example (24), the adverb "meticulously" in "It meticulously assesses the operation of these sites to ensure..." signals a thorough, detail-oriented evaluation process. This careful scrutiny exemplifies sustained dedication to marine eco-environmental safeguarding, reinforcing the "Maritime Environmental Protector" image by emphasizing relentless attention to effectiveness and precision. Using "firm" in "...laying firm marine eco-environmental foundations for building..." emphasizes the establishment of a robust, stable base for long-term governance. This lexical choice reflects steadfast perseverance in nurturing marine sustainability, thereby constructing the "Effective Maritime Governor" image through demonstrated tenacity in foundational planning..

### 4.10 Veracity Resources

Veracity is most likely to be applied to the arguability of a person or an entity's sincerity. It is related to the evaluation of the truthfulness, accuracy, and reliability of a particular assessment. It can be seen as an important factor in determining the credibility and validity of an appraisal, which can further ensure the integrity and usefulness of something, and thus people can make informed decisions based on this information. Some examples are listed as follows:

| Image (Strong Maritime Country) | Example | Appraiser | Appraised |
|---|---|---|---|
| Global Maritime Collaborator | (26) Countries around the world are building consensus and working…(Text-8) | International Community and Public | International Cooperation and Global Governance |
| Effective Maritime Governor | (27) China has developed an objective understanding of the laws…(Text-2) | Chinese Government | Policies, Regulations, and Governance Systems |
| Maritime Environmental Protector | (28) These include practicing responsible tourism…(Text-7) | Chinese Institutions | Marine Eco-Environment and Protection Actions |

The expression "consensus" in Example (26), drawn from the phrase "building consensus and working", highlights China's emphasis on international cooperation and collective decision-making. Rather than merely indicating agreement, "consensus" suggests a deliberate effort to foster mutual understanding and shared commitment in global maritime governance. This choice of language contributes to the image of an Global Maritime Collaborator, projecting China as a proactive and collaborative actor in shaping maritime norms and policies. In Example (27), the word "objective" in the clause "developed an objective understanding of the laws" signals a commitment to rational, unbiased interpretation of legal frameworks. By foregrounding objectivity, this expression portrays China's governance approach as informed, evidence-based, and legally rigorous. Such a portrayal reinforces the image of a Effective Maritime Governor, where decisions are not driven by arbitrary power but by reasoned engagement with regulatory structures. Turning to Example (28), "responsible" in "practicing responsible tourism" evokes ethical accountability and ecological consciousness. This term emphasizes more than just sustainable practice; it implies a sense of duty toward environmental protection and long-term stewardship. In doing so, it supports the construction of an Maritime Environmental Protector, where both policy and public behavior reflect a commitment to marine conservation.

### 4.11 Propriety Resources

In appraisal theory, propriety refers to the evaluation of the appropriateness or correctness of a person or entity's actions, behaviors, or responses in a given situation. It concerns whether appraisals are accurate reflections of the personal significance and valence of the events or situations being appraised. Some examples are listed as follows:

| Image (Strong Maritime Country) | Example | Appraiser | Appraised |
|---|---|---|---|
| Maritime Environmental Protector | (29) These areas, which are economically developed and densely populated and whose marine… (Text-5) | Chinese Government | Marine Economy and Green Transformation |
| Eco-Economic Maritime Developer | (30) …with a focus on addressing acute marine eco-environmental … (Text-6) | Chinese Government | Marine Economy and Green Transformation |
| Environmental Maritime Protector | (32) …and developed an eco-friendly marine economy to meet the people's diverse needs… (Text-7) | Chinese Government | Marine Eco-Environment and Protection Actions |

Example (29), the adjective "economically" signals the government's sensitivity to the interplay between development and environmental stewardship. This contextual awareness ensures that protection measures are appropriately calibrated to local

socioeconomic conditions, reinforcing the "Maritime Environmental Protector" image through targeted, region-specific interventions. When the policy speaks of addressing issues "with a focus on addressing acute marine eco-environmental" challenges, the noun "focus" highlights a deliberate prioritization of pressing concerns. Such strategic targeting exemplifies the "Eco-Economic Maritime Developer," demonstrating efficient resource allocation and a methodical approach to achieving ecologica-economic equilibrium. In Example (32), the term "eco-friendly" encapsulates an ethically appropriate stance in marine economic development—one that seeks to meet economic needs without compromising environmental integrity. By foregrounding ecological compatibility, this expression reinforces the narrative of an Eco-Economic Maritime Developer, committed to long-term ecological viability.

In summary, the discourse on China's marine eco-environmental protection strategically deploys judgment resources to construct a unified, positive national image as a strong, ethically driven maritime power, integrating five key personas: the Effective Maritime Governor, highlighted by capacity (e.g., "strengthened planning," "implemented systems"), which underscores institutional competence in policy design and governance; the Maritime Environmental Protector, emphasized through tenacity (e.g., "solid action," "meticulous assessment"), reflecting relentless commitment to ecological restoration; the Global Maritime Collaborator, framed via normality (e.g., "special national plans") and veracity (e.g., "consensus-building"), aligning China with international norms and validating its transparency; the Eco-Economic Maritime Developer, anchored in propriety (e.g., "eco-friendly," "responsible tourism"), which balances economic growth with ethical sustainability; and the Environmental Maritime Protector, reinforced by lexical choices like "vulnerable ecosystems" and "priority protection," signaling adaptive stewardship.

### 4.12 Appreciation Construction in Marine Eco-Environmental Protection in China

With appreciation, we turn to the meanings that shape our evaluations of "things", especially the things we create and the performances we give. This also includes how we value natural phenomena. In general terms, appreciation can be divided into our "reactions" to things (do they catch our attention; do they please us?), their "composition" (balance and complexity), and their "value" (how innovative, authentic timely, etc.), and is highlighted when evaluations of objects, products, events, or even the products of human behavior are made, or when anything is judged in these terms.

**Table 5 Distribution of Appreciation Resources in *Marine Eco-Environmental Protection in China***

| Judgement-Type | | Postive (number) | Negative (number) | Total (number) | Proportion (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Reaction | Normality | 23 | 0 | 23 | 6% |
| | Capacity | 266 | 3 | 269 | 76% |
| | Tenecity | 66 | 0 | 66 | 18% |
| | Total | 355 | 3 | 358 | 100% |
| | Proportion | 98% | 2% | 100% | |
| Composition | Veracity | 9 | 0 | 9 | 12% |
| | Propriety | 63 | 0 | 63 | 87% |
| | Total | 72 | 0 | 72 | 100% |
| | Proportion | 100% | 0% | 100% | |

The table "Distribution of Appreciation Resources in *Marine Eco-Environmental Protection in China*" offers a nuanced view of how a strong maritime country's image is constructed. Under "Reaction," "Normality" (23 positive, 0 negative, 6%) indicates China's marine protection actions align with expected standards, fostering reliability and consistency. "Capacity" (266 positive, 3 negative, 76%) highlights robust capability in managing marine environments, essential for effective governance and addressing challenges. "Tenacity" (66 positive, 0 negative, 18%) showcases unwavering commitment to long - term conservation, a vital trait for sustained efforts. In "Composition," "Veracity" (9 positive, 0 negative, 12%) suggests genuineness in initiatives, building trust, while "Propriety" (63 positive, 0 negative, 87%) underscores appropriate, ethically sound measures, reflecting thoughtful governance.

Collectively, the near-total positivity of these appraisals—98% in "Reaction" and 100% in "Composition"—constructs a composite image of a maritime nation that is competent, consistent, ethical, and trustworthy. These attitudinal evaluations serve not merely to describe policies but to semiotically position China as a credible, principled, and future-oriented maritime power, capable of leading sustainable ocean governance.

### 4.13 Impact Resources

Impact refers to the evaluation of the emotional or cognitive influence of an event or action on an individual. It involves assessing how significantly an event or action affects the person's emotions, thoughts, attitudes, or well-being. Some examples are listed as follows:

| Image (Strong Maritime Country) | Example | Appraiser | Appraised |
|---|---|---|---|
| Environmental Maritime Protector | (33) These tourism models showcase the compelling stories attached to traditional maritime culture... (Text-5) | Chinese Government | Marine Eco-Environment and Protection Actions |
| Maritime Environmental Protector | (34) ...drift trajectory forecasting and key-area smart visual surveillance to realize... (Text-4) | Chinese Government | Marine Eco-Environment and Protection Actions |
| Global Maritime Collaborator | (35) automatic, intelligent, precise, and cover more parts of the world... (Text-5) | Chinese Government | Marine Eco-Environment and Protection Actions |

In example (33), the term "compelling" in "compelling stories attached to traditional maritime culture" underscores the affective and rhetorical power of cultural narratives embedded in eco-tourism models. By integrating environmental awareness with culturally resonant storytelling, these practices do more than attract attention—they generate emotional engagement and promote sustainable values, thereby enhancing the image of an Environmental Maritime Protector through soft power and cultural appeal. Example (34) employs "smart" to underscore the deployment of advanced, intelligent technologies in marine monitoring. This term frames the government as a "Maritime Environmental Protector" leveraging innovation for precise ecological oversight, thereby enhancing stakeholder confidence in its technical prowess. In example (35), "intelligent" alongside "automatic" and "precise" emphasizes sophisticated, high-tech systems, indicating a forward-thinking strategy to expand coverage in marine protection. This advanced methodology contributes to the image of a capable, innovative Global Maritime Collaborator, effectively managing and safeguarding the marine environment through cutting-edge approaches.

### 4.14 Quality Resources

Quality refers to the characteristics and traits that are used to describe and evaluate individuals, things, or actions. It concerns whether people like something or not. Some examples are listed as follows:

| Image (Strong Maritime Country) | Example | Appraiser | Appraised |
|---|---|---|---|
| Global Maritime Collaborator | (36) It is ready to work with other countries...beautiful world where oceans... (Text-9) | International Community and Public | Social Participation and Public Well being |
| Maritime Environmental Protector | (37) Eco-environmental awareness is championed throughout Chinese society... (Text-7) | Chinese Government | Marine Eco-Environment and Protection Actions |
| Eco-Economic Maritime Developer | (38) ...and promoted high-quality economic development... (Text-2) | Chinese Government | Marine Economy and Green Transformation |

Example (36) employs the adjective "beautiful" in "beautiful world where oceans," which evokes an aspirational and emotionally resonant image of global maritime cooperation. Rather than merely suggesting aesthetic value, the word gestures toward a shared ideal and a harmonious international future, reinforcing the image of an Global Maritime Collaborator committed to building a collaborative and desirable global order. In example (37), the verb "championed" in "Eco-environmental awareness is championed throughout Chinese society" signifies more than governmental endorsement—it points to active leadership and widespread societal participation. This term highlights a top-down and bottom-up alignment in environmental values, contributing to the Maritime Environmental Protector image through a portrayal of ecological consciousness as a collective national ethos. Example (38) centers on the phrase "high-quality" in "promoted high-quality economic development," which suggests a nuanced prioritization of long-term value, environmental compatibility, and developmental integrity. This choice of language underscores China's pursuit of economic advancement that is not only robust but also refined and responsible, constructing the image of an Eco-Economic Maritime Developer where growth and sustainability are mutually reinforcing.

### 4.15 Balance Resources

Balance concerns with whether something hangs together. Some examples of balance attitudinal resources are as follows：

| Image (Strong Maritime Country) | Example | Appraiser | Appraised |
|---|---|---|---|
| Global Maritime Collaborator | (39) ...harmonious coexistence between humans and the ocean. (Text-1) | International Community and Public | Social Participation and Public Well being |
| Maritime Environmental Protector | (40) ...low-carbon and sustainable development of the ocean. (Text-2) | Chinese Government | Marine Eco-Environment and Protection Actions |
| Eco-Economic Maritime Developer | (41) China has adopted robust measures to coordinate land-sea pollution control and monitor...(Text-4) | Chinese Government | Marine Eco-Environment and Protection Actions |

In example (39), the adjective "harmonious" in "harmonious coexistence between humans and the ocean" encapsulates a vision of equilibrium and mutual respect between humanity and the marine environment. This term aligns with international discourses on sustainability and shared ecological responsibility, thereby contributing to the image of an Global Maritime Collaborator that advocates for globally recognized principles of marine stewardship. The word "sustainable" in example (40), drawn from the phrase "low-carbon and sustainable development of the ocean," emphasizes endurance, ecological foresight, and climate-conscious growth. It signals not only environmental care but also a commitment to long-term viability, reinforcing the Maritime Environmental Protector image through a focus on continuity and resilience in marine governance. In example (41), the verb "coordinate" in "coordinate land-sea pollution control and monitor" suggests a systematic, integrated approach to environmental management. It points to China's capacity for cross-sectoral planning and execution, underscoring a strategic alignment of environmental protection with economic development. This contributes to the image of an Eco-Economic Maritime Developer, where governance is not fragmented but unified and results-oriented.

### 4.16 Complexity Resources

Complexity refers to the intricate nature of evaluating a person's performance or characteristics. It focuses on the richness and diversity of the evaluated person or event, allowing for a more accurate and holistic assessment of one's capability and potential for growth. Some examples of complexity attitudinal resources are as follows：

| Image (Strong Maritime Country) | Example | Appraiser | Appraised |
|---|---|---|---|
| Effective Maritime Governor | (42) …achieve region-specific and precise regulation of the nearshore… (Text-6) | Chinese Government | Policies, Regulations, and Governance Systems |
| Maritime Environmental Protector | (43)  China employs diverse          means such as remote… (Text-6) | Chinese Government | Marine Eco-Environment and Protection Actions |
| Effective Maritime Governor | (44) Synergizing multiple measures for building beautiful bays. (Text-4) | Chinese Government | Policies, Regulations, and Governance Systems |

Example (42) features the term "precise" in "achieve region-specific and precise regulation," which foregrounds the Chinese Government's attentive and fine-grained regulatory approach toward coastal governance. The emphasis on spatial specificity and accuracy signals a capacity for tailored, context-sensitive management, contributing to the construction of a Effective Maritime Governor that exercises effective control through targeted policymaking. In example (43), the use of "diverse" in "employs diverse means" points to the deployment of a broad spectrum of methods, such as remote-sensing technologies, for marine ecological protection. This lexical choice conveys a sense of strategic adaptability and comprehensiveness, reinforcing the image of an Maritime Environmental Protector that is committed to multifaceted and innovative environmental stewardship. The term "multiple", found in example (44)'s phrase "synergizing multiple measures," underscores an integrated, collaborative framework for constructing beautiful bays. By highlighting the convergence of various strategies, this word contributes to the portrayal of a Effective Maritime Governor capable of mobilizing complex systems and actors toward shared ecological goals.

### 4.17 Valuation Resources
Valuation concerns the question of the worth of somebody or something. Some examples are listed as follows:

| Image (Strong Maritime Country) | Example | Appraiser | Appraised |
|---|---|---|---|
| Maritime Environmental Protector | (45) China gives effective protection to marine life by safeguarding…(Text-5) | Chinese Government | Marine Eco-Environment and Protection Actions |
| Effective Maritime Governor | (46) …applied innovative construction techniques and methods during the building process…(Text-5) | Chinese Institution | Policies, Regulations, and Governance Systems |
| Eco-Economic Maritime Developer | (47) Blue seas and clean beaches, like clear waters and green mountains, are invaluable assets. (Text-7) | Chinese Government | Marine Economy and Green Transformation |

In example (45), the term "effective" in "China gives effective protection to marine life" foregrounds the demonstrable success of China's conservation initiatives, suggesting that these measures are not merely implemented but yield tangible ecological outcomes. This highlights the functional value of such efforts in sustaining biodiversity, thereby reinforcing the image of an Maritime Environmental Protector committed to meaningful environmental action. Example (46) introduces the word "innovative" in "applied innovative construction techniques and methods," which underscores the instrumental value of novel

governance practices. By emphasizing ingenuity in marine-related infrastructural development, this lexeme constructs the identity of a Effective Maritime Governor that actively embraces forward-thinking and policy modernization in response to complex ecological and administrative challenges. In example (47), the descriptor "invaluable" conveys the irreplaceable worth of marine environments, positioning them as central to both economic vitality and ecological preservation. This articulation contributes to the portrayal of an Eco-Economic Maritime Developer, where natural resources are not only economically significant but also intrinsically treasured.

In summary, the discourse on China's marine eco-environmental protection strategically employs appreciation resources to construct a cohesive, aspirational image of the nation as a globally engaged, ethically driven, and technologically advanced maritime power, integrating five key personas: the Environmental Maritime Protector, highlighted by impact terms like "compelling" (cultural narratives) and "smart" (intelligent surveillance), which emphasize emotional resonance and technical innovation in ecological stewardship; the Global Maritime Collaborator, framed through quality descriptors such as "beautiful" (aspirational cooperation) and balance terms like "harmonious coexistence," signaling alignment with global sustainability ideals and collaborative governance; the Eco-Economic Maritime Developer, underscored by valuation lexemes like "high-quality" and "invaluable," which position China as balancing economic growth with environmental integrity through refined, responsible development; the Effective Maritime Governor, reinforced by complexity markers such as "precise" (region-specific regulation) and "multiple" (synergized measures), showcasing adaptive, multifaceted governance; and the Maritime Environmental Protector, further solidified through balance terms like "sustainable" and valuation phrases like "effective protection," reflecting a commitment to enduring, results-driven ecological action.

### 4.18 Specific Images of a Strong Maritime Country

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the construction of China as a strong maritime country has been a key focus. Through the analysis of attitudinal resources in the corpus, five distinct images have emerged, each constructed in a unique way with the support of relevant data and examples.

Environmental Maritime Protector: This image is constructed through a combination of positive appreciation, affect, and judgment resources. In the appreciation category, terms like "eco-friendly" (Example 32) highlight the appropriate and sustainable approach to marine economic development, with 87% of "Propriety" appreciation resources being positive, emphasizing the correct stance in environmental protection. Affect resources also play a role, such as the positive emotions associated with the safety and well - being of the marine environment. For example, in In/security resources, actions like "built strong safeguards for marine" (Example 16) convey a sense of security and protection, with 23% of In/security resources being positive and focused on safeguarding. In judgment resources, "meticulously" in "It meticulously assesses the operation of these sites to ensure…" (Example 24) shows the tenacity and attention to detail in protecting the marine eco - environment, with 18% of "Tenacity" judgment resources contributing to this image.

Effective Maritime Governor: This image is strongly supported by judgment resources. The "Capacity" sub - type within "Social Esteem" has a large number of positive judgments (266 out of 269), as seen in examples like "It has gradually strengthened overall planning…" (Example 21) and "implemented a marine spatial planning system" (Example 22), which demonstrate the government's ability to manage and improve maritime governance. "Normality" resources also contribute, such as "the country has published special national protection action plans or programs…" (Example 17), with 6% of "Normality" judgment resources positioning China's maritime policies within the expected governance framework. Additionally, in affect resources, words like "will" in "China amended…will bear responsibility for the environmental quality of sea areas under their jurisdiction" (Example 5) show forward - looking and institutional arrangements, further reinforcing this image.

Eco-Economic Maritime Developer: Positive appreciation and judgment resources are crucial for constructing this image. In appreciation, the "Capacity" sub - type (76% positive) highlights the ability to manage the marine environment, as in the case of ensuring good water quality (Example 13). In judgment, the "Capacity" sub - type again plays a role, with the government's recognition of challenges like "highly vulnerable ecosystems" (Example 20) and taking measures to address them, showing the capacity to balance marine economy and ecology. The term "high - quality" in "promoted high - quality economic development" (Example 38) also emphasizes the positive approach to economic growth in the context of marine development, contributing to this image.

Global Maritime Collaborator: This image is mainly constructed through positive attitudinal resources in the context of international cooperation. In examples like "Countries around the world are building consensus and working…" (Example 26), the term "consensus" reflects China's emphasis on international cooperation, with positive evaluations from the international community and public in this regard. In appreciation resources, terms like "beautiful" in "beautiful world where oceans…" (Example 36) evoke an aspirational image of global maritime cooperation. Also, in judgment resources, China's support for

international conventions in "China supports advancing global marine eco - environmental protection... UNCLOS and other international conventions concerning the sea" (Example 7) positions it as a responsible global collaborator.

People-Oriented Maritime Builder: Affect resources are central to constructing this image. Words like "enjoy" in "People can safely enjoy the sea..." (Example 8) and "happiness" in "It works to ensure that the people can have safe and green seafood,...and happiness" (Example 9) directly reflect the public's positive emotions and well - being, with positive evaluations in the Un/happiness and Dis/satisfaction affect sub - types. In judgment resources, the government's encouragement of public participation in "They encourage people...and personal engagement with the sea among the public" (Example 6) shows a focus on social participation and public well - being, further strengthening this image.

In summary, these five images together paint a comprehensive picture of China's pursuit of becoming a strong maritime country, with each image being constructed through a distinct combination of attitudinal resources, data, and real-world examples, reflecting China's multi - faceted efforts in maritime development, environmental protection, international cooperation, and people-centered governance.

## 5. Conclusion

This study employs Martin and White's Attitude System within Appraisal Theory to analyze how the white paper *Marine Eco-Environmental Protection in China* discursively constructs China's image as a strong maritime country, revealing the strategic use of evaluative language to shape perceptions of governance, ecology, and international collaboration. Through a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the 13,843-word corpus, the research identifies that positive attitudinal resources dominate the discourse, accounting for 96% of all evaluations, which serve to frame China's marine protection efforts as successful, ethical, and aligned with global sustainability norms, while negative evaluations are minimally used to acknowledge challenges without undermining the overall narrative of progress.

The five personas of China's marine governance—Global Maritime Collaborator, Maritime Environmental Protector, Eco-Economic Maritime Developer, Environmental Maritime Protector, and Effective Maritime Governor—are constructed through judgment, appreciation, and affect resources to project China as a visionary maritime leader. The Global Maritime Collaborator combines judgment and appreciation to frame international cooperation; the Maritime Environmental Protector leverages judgmentand appreciation to highlight technical and ethical stewardship; the Eco-Economic Maritime Developer merges judgment with appreciation  to balance growth and sustainability; the Environmental Maritime Protector uses judgment and appreciation to emphasize adaptive governance; and the Effective Maritime Governor integrates judgment and appreciation to showcase institutional efficacy. Through affect and overwhelmingly positive evaluations, the discourse naturalizes China as a moral, innovative, and collaborative maritime power, harmonizing ecological integrity, economic progress, and global leadership.

This study expands Appraisal Theory's application in political discourse by revealing how China's white paper strategically deploys evaluative language (96% positive evaluations) to construct a multi-dimensional maritime governance identity , bridging micro-linguistic analysis with macro nation-branding. Methodologically, it demonstrates the efficacy of corpus-based mixed methods in decoding politically sensitive texts, balancing quantitative attitudinal trends with qualitative persona modeling. Practically, the findings offer policymakers a framework to align environmental narratives with global sustainability goals while maintaining credibility through managed transparency.

While this research advances the theoretical application of Appraisal Theory to Chinese political discourse and offers practical insights into the discursive alignment of domestic policy with international environmental norms, it is subject to several limitations. First, focusing solely on the English version of the white paper may overlook nuances present in the Chinese original or in bilingual intertextual dynamics. Second, the Attitude System captures only evaluative meaning; other Appraisal domains (Engagement, Graduation) and multimodal semiotic resources (visuals, layout) remain unexplored. Third, our qualitative judgments, though grounded in systematic coding, may reflect interpretive biases. Finally, the study's corpus is limited to a single official text; expanding analysis to include speeches, media reports, and comparative documents would yield a more comprehensive picture of China's maritime identity construction. Future research might therefore pursue cross-linguistic comparisons, incorporate additional Appraisal categories and modalities, and broaden the discourse sample to deepen our understanding of the linguistic strategies underpinning maritime governance narratives.

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